



Social Capital and What It Means to Maine

A Report by the

MAINE COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

Published in conjunction with
A Briefing on Social Capital
held at the Blaine House,
Augusta, Maine
September 25, 2001

Foreword

The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey of nearly 30,000 citizens undertaken last year was the largest-ever survey measuring the level of civic engagement of Americans. The John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University sponsored the survey in partnership with a consortium of 36 community foundations and a handful of private foundations.

What is social capital? In his book *Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Harvard professor Robert Putnam presented a compelling overview of communities in America and the “civic engagement” that helps keep them stable and healthy.

A growing body of research shows that communities with high social capital, or social networks based on mutual respect, trust and reciprocity, are likely to have higher educational achievement, better performing governmental institutions and less violence and crime. [Please turn to the back of this monograph for more information about the concept of social capital.]

The Maine Community Foundation, in partnership with Lewiston-Auburn College of the University of Southern Maine, sponsored the social capital survey of the greater Lewiston-Auburn area. The results of the survey will be used to inform future grant making. The foundation will also work with community foundations involved in the project to develop a survey that can be used

by other communities to assess their own strengths and weaknesses.

The purpose of this monograph is to make the Lewiston-Auburn findings available to community leaders, legislators and charitably minded citizens interested in strengthening Maine communities. We believe these findings can serve as a significant resource for decision-makers throughout the state, now and into the future.

The Maine Community Foundation thanks Governor Angus S. King for his enthusiastic support of this study. We also salute the following individuals from Lewiston-Auburn College: Dr. Betty D. Robinson, Dean and Associate Professor of Leadership and Organizational Studies, for her academic support; Dr. Marvin Druker, Associate Professor of Leadership and Organizational Skills, for his analysis of the data; and Nancy Whitehouse, Curriculum Technology Coordinator, for her tech savvy.

Finally, a special note of appreciation is owed the Maine Community Foundation’s own Meredith Jones, Vice President for Program Development and Grant Making Services, who provided outstanding and invaluable oversight of the survey process.

Please set aside time to read this document. In conjunction with the 2000 Census, these findings demand our attention if we are to continue to strengthen communities throughout Maine.

**Henry L.P. Schmelzer, President
Maine Community Foundation**

Excerpts from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey

*Executive Summary prepared by Saguario Seminar: Civic Engagement in America
A Project of the John F. Kennedy School for Government, Harvard University*

In a historic partnership, some three dozen community foundations have committed themselves to a long-term campaign to rebuild levels of connectedness in their communities.

As the first step, the foundations conducted “community physicals” using the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey. The survey maps the relative strengths and areas for improvement in their communities’ civic behavior and sets a baseline against which future progress can be assessed in another survey several years hence.

The effort builds on the work of Professor Robert D. Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival of the American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000). This landmark work details how our civic ties have weakened over the last generation and the price we pay for these frayed ties in the quality of our education, our physical health and happiness, the safety on our streets, the responsiveness of democratic institutions of government, and in economic development.

The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey is comprised of a national sample of 3,000 respondents and representative samples in 40 communities nationwide (across 29 states) covering an additional 26,200 respondents. The survey is the largest scientific investigation of civic engagement ever conducted in America.

President Bush began his presidency by exhorting us to be “citizens, not spectators” and to serve our nation “beginning with your neighbor,” and built on the Clinton Administration’s similar interest in civic engagement. Given this backdrop, the survey

represents an extraordinary and enormous trove of data for policy makers, researchers, and community-builders.

Community connectedness linked to happiness and vibrant communities

Social capital and social trust matter a lot in relation to the quality of life in our communities and our personal happiness.

Social connectedness is a much stronger predictor of the perceived quality of life in a community than the community’s income *or* educational level. In the five communities surveyed having the highest social trust, 52% of residents rated their community as an *excellent* place to live, the highest possible grade. In the five communities with the lowest levels of social trust, only 31% felt that good about their quality of life.

Similarly, personal happiness is also much more closely tied to the level of community social connectedness and trust than to income or educational levels. This is true, even controlling for individual characteristics, such as income, education, and so on. That is, even comparing two persons of identical income, education, race, age, and so on, the one living in a high social capital community typically reports greater personal happiness than his/her “twin” living in a low social capital community.

The same thing is not true of the overall level of *community* income or education. In other words, your personal happiness *is not* directly affected by the affluence of your community, but it *is* quite directly affected by the social connectedness of your community.

Dimensions of Social Capital

Among literally hundreds of different measures of social capital in the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, some people (or communities) broadly are more (or less) socially connected. People with lots of friends are more likely to vote more, to attend church more often, and to bowl in leagues. This means that you can speak of a person (or a community) as being generally high (or low) in social capital.

What follows is a brief description of the different facets of social capital that have emerged from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey.

TRUST

Social trust: At the core of social capital is the question of whether you can trust other people. Often this trust is forged with specific people through common participation in groups, associations, and activities. Nevertheless, when this trust transcends from trust of *specific* individuals to generalized trust, it is extraordinarily valuable. Much like cash is more efficient than barter (because it eliminates the need to negotiate each transaction), generalized social trust is extremely important in lubricating social interaction and getting things accomplished.

Our first index of social trust combines trust of people in one's neighborhood, co-workers, shop clerks, co-religionists, local police, and finally "most people."

Inter-racial trust: A critical challenge facing communities attempting to build social capital is the fact that it is simply harder to do in places that are more diverse. The measure of inter-racial trust looks at the extent to which different racial groups (Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians) trust one another and is thus one proxy for the health of inter-racial relations in a community.

Diversity of friendships: Equally important to their levels of social trust are how diverse people's social networks are. Since it was impractical in a 25 minute phone survey to ask each person surveyed to list all the people he/she knew and to describe each one, the

survey asked (as a proxy) whether the respondent had a personal friend who: is a business owner, was on welfare, owned a vacation home, is gay, is a manual worker, is White, is Black, is Hispanic, is Asian, is a community leader, and was of a different faith.

This index thus broadly measures the degree to which people's social networks (and collectively a community's networks) are diverse. These "bridging ties" are especially valuable in producing community solidarity and in forging a larger consensus on how communities need to change or work together.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Conventional politics participation: One of the key measures for how engaged we are in communities is the extent to which we are involved politically. This measure looks at how many in our communities are registered to vote, actually vote, express interest in politics, are knowledgeable about political affairs, and read the newspaper regularly.

Protest politics participation: The data in the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey indicate that many communities that exhibit low levels of participation in conventional/electoral ways, nonetheless exhibit high levels of participation in protest forms, such as taking part in marches, demonstrations, boycotts, rallies, participating in groups that took action for local reform, participating in labor and ethnically-related groups. This dimension is a composite of those types of participation.

CIVIC LEADERSHIP AND ASSOCIATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Many people typically get involved locally by joining groups that they care about (be they veterans groups, sports groups, literary groups, or new age poetry clubs). We measured such engagement in two ways:

Civic leadership: This is a composite measure both of how frequently respondents were engaged in groups, clubs and local discussions of town or school affairs, and also whether the respondent took a leadership role within these groups. Communities that rank high on this aspect of social capital benefit from a hum of civic activity.

Associational involvement: The survey measured associational involvement across 18 broad categories of groups (including an “other” category). Respondents were asked about participation in the following types of groups: organizations affiliated with religion; sports clubs, leagues, or outdoor activities; youth organizations; parent associations or other school support groups; veterans groups; neighborhood associations; seniors groups; charity or social welfare organizations; labor unions; professional, trade, farm or business associations; service or fraternal organizations; ethnic, nationality, or civil rights organizations; political groups; literary, art, or musical groups; hobby, investment, or garden clubs; self-help programs; groups that meet only over the Internet; and any other type of groups or associations.

INFORMAL SOCIALIZING

While many communities (or individuals) are either higher or lower generally in social capital, some communities or individuals are more likely to develop social connections through formal memberships and associations (“*machers*”) and others are more likely to develop these connections through informal friendships (“*schmoozers*”).

While the “civic leadership” and “associational involvement” measures above capture the formal social ties, the “informal socializing” dimension measures the degree to which residents had friends over to their home, hung out with friends in a public place, socialized with co-workers outside of work, played cards or board games with others, and visited with relatives.

GIVING AND VOLUNTEERING

One way Americans express their concern for others is through giving to charity or volunteering. Various aspects of generosity go together: people who are generous with their purse are also generous with their time. The same is true of communities. This dimension

measures how often community residents volunteer at various venues and how generous they are in giving.

FAITH-BASED ENGAGEMENT

Religion in America is a big part of social capital. Roughly one-half of all American connectedness is religious or religiously affiliated, whether measured by memberships, volunteering time, or philanthropy. Thus, this dimension matters a lot to overall levels of community connection.

This measure of faith-based engagement looks at: religious attendance and membership, participation in church activities besides services, participation in organizations affiliated with religion, giving to religious causes and volunteering at places of worship.

EQUALITY OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACROSS THE COMMUNITY

In some communities the ranks of the civic are much more heavily skewed towards those who are wealthier, more educated, and whiter. In other communities, the poor, less educated, and people of color participate at rates much closer to their wealthier, whiter and more educated brethren. Since it is important to the community health, this measure scores highly those communities with more egalitarian civic participation

VARIATION BETWEEN COMMUNITIES ANALYSIS

While the survey contained a national reference sample, the heart of the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey consisted of 40 American communities taking stock of their levels of local social capital. A website for the survey at www.cfsv.org/community_survey highlights what each of the communities believes is interesting about its data, and compares the communities on the key social capital dimensions discussed above.

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN MAINE

Introduction

Are communities in our country growing apart? Is there less civic involvement at the beginning of the 21st century than “in the good old days”? These questions and other issues were the focus of a national research project that took place in 1999-2000.

The Maine Community Foundation joined in a partnership with Harvard University’s Saguro Seminar, part of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, and 32 community foundations across the country to assess the level of social capital in communities. The survey explored, among other issues, the level of trust among a community’s citizens, the degree to which residents socialized, and the extent to which they joined with others.

The Maine Community Foundation and its counterparts across the nation wanted to know about the connectedness of their communities, to discover how social capital contributes to community well-being—and, most importantly perhaps, how civic involvement can become a predictor of the quality of life in a community.

The foundation seized the opportunity to participate in this significant national survey as a way to determine a baseline for social capital, specifically in the Lewiston-Auburn metropolitan area. Using the findings, targeted social initiatives sponsored by the foundation—and their impacts over time—can now be well-documented.

Background

The survey is based on the significant research of Robert D. Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival of the American Community*, who found a decline in civic ties in the last part of the 20th century. The decline appears to affect every aspect of our lives—health and happiness, quality of education, economic development—as well as our perceptions of basic rights such as personal safety and the responsiveness of local and national government.

As Putnam notes in his book, at the turn of the 20th century the consolidation of firms, industrialization, increased immigration, urbanization, and a growing gap between rich and poor resulted in a similar civic decline. He argues that the Progressive Era and the emergence of a social-welfare system provided a critical response to this decline—and that a similar, new social movement to re-build social connectedness is needed again.

Many possible explanations for declining social capital over the past generation have been offered, among them, the significant migration of women into the workforce, generational differences as regards a sense of civic responsibility, TV watching, increased commuter time, computer-related activity, and the changing nature of work.

The objective of the Kennedy School-led partnership was to take a “snapshot” of current levels of civic engagement and connectedness. Together, the community surveys paint a picture of the national situation and circumstances in forty local areas, providing a critical context and comparison for Maine’s communities.

Methodology

The survey was designed with input from the participating community foundations. The international professional polling firm of Taylor Nelson Sofres Intersearch was retained to test, pilot and administer a telephone survey based on a random sample of telephone numbers drawn from 40 communities and a separate 3,000-person national survey.

To have an effective, representative sample from the Lewiston-Auburn community, the polling firm needed at least 420 respondents. The final sample size was 523. Statistical weighting was used to reproduce the population distribution of sex, age, education and race/ethnicity in the community.

A variety of indices of different types of social capital were developed, including civic participation, faith-based social capital, social

trust, diversity of friendships, charity and group involvement. All partners in the survey agreed to make all data part of the public domain.

Measures of Social Capital

An index or measure of *social trust* was established, based on respondents' answers to questions about whether "most people can be trusted," and about trust of neighbors, co-workers, shop clerks, people of various races, and local policy makers.

Civic participation was measured by questions on voter registration; participation in the 1996 election; interest level in politics, political knowledge, petition signing; working on community projects; and frequency of newspaper reading.

Faith-based social capital questions included those on church attendance, church membership, and volunteering in or giving to established faith-based groups.

For a measure of *informal social capital*, an index of questions on time spent with friends, playing cards, socializing with co-workers, hanging out at the mall and visiting with relatives was used.

Organized group social capital was measured using questions on membership in, and attendance of, club, union or other political organization meetings, as well as attendance of public meeting and local area community events. This index included participation rates in

organized service groups such as Rotary and Lions Club. Additionally, it reflects social connectedness through support groups or hobby or veterans clubs.

Interracial trust included questions on trust levels of whites, African Americans or blacks, Asians, Hispanics or Latinos and, unique to the Maine survey, Franco-Americans. Trust levels of other groups were then compared to the level of trust of the respondents' own group.

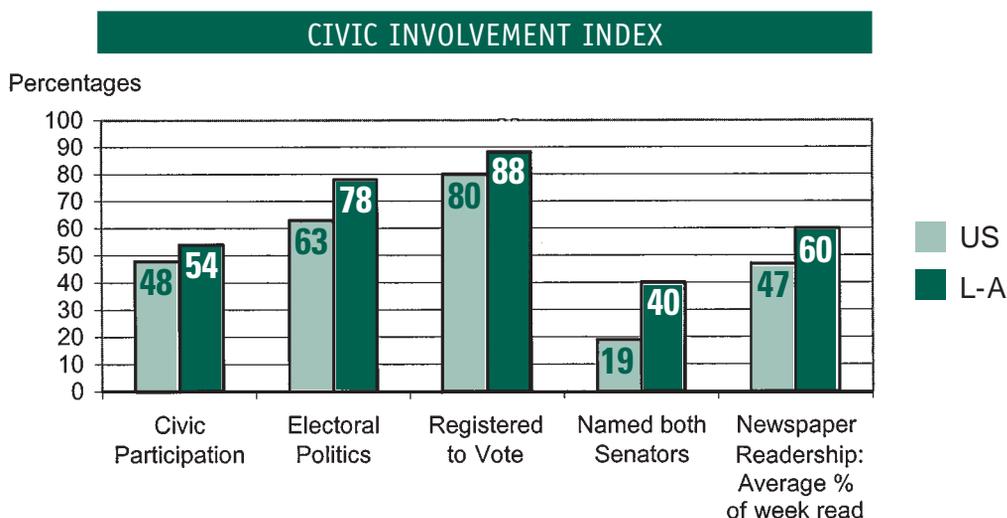
The level of interest in *community volunteerism* was measured by assessing the respondent's interest in participating in arts, health-related, neighborhood, religious, youth, parent-teacher, and poor or elderly groups.

Questions focusing on the amount of *charitable giving* asked about contributions to both religious and non-religious organizations.

Trends in Lewiston-Auburn

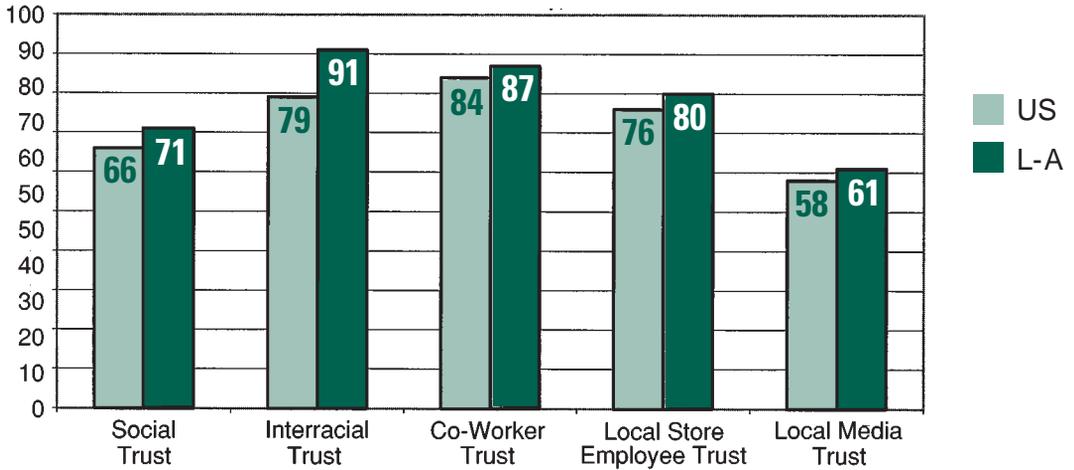
The Lewiston-Auburn metropolitan area sample placed in the top 15% of the 40 communities in terms of social capital taken as a whole, which means the Maine sample indicated relatively high levels of trust and community involvement. *In another key finding, the survey found that an individual's class played far less of a role in the level of social connectedness in L-A than in other communities across the nation.*

L-A shows a particular strength in political civic involvement, where the city is shown to



TRUST INDEX

Percentages



exceed the national rates for civic participation (54% vs. 48%), voter registration (88% vs. 80%), and participation in electoral politics (78% vs. 63%). The community also exceeds the national ability to name both of its senators by a remarkable 21%.

When asked if they trust their local government to “do what is right,” 46% of the L-A sample responded “always” or “most of the time,” and 42% said “some of the time.” Only 10% replied “never.”

L-A citizens read their local newspaper 60% of the week versus only 47% for citizens nationally, pointing to their interest in the civic

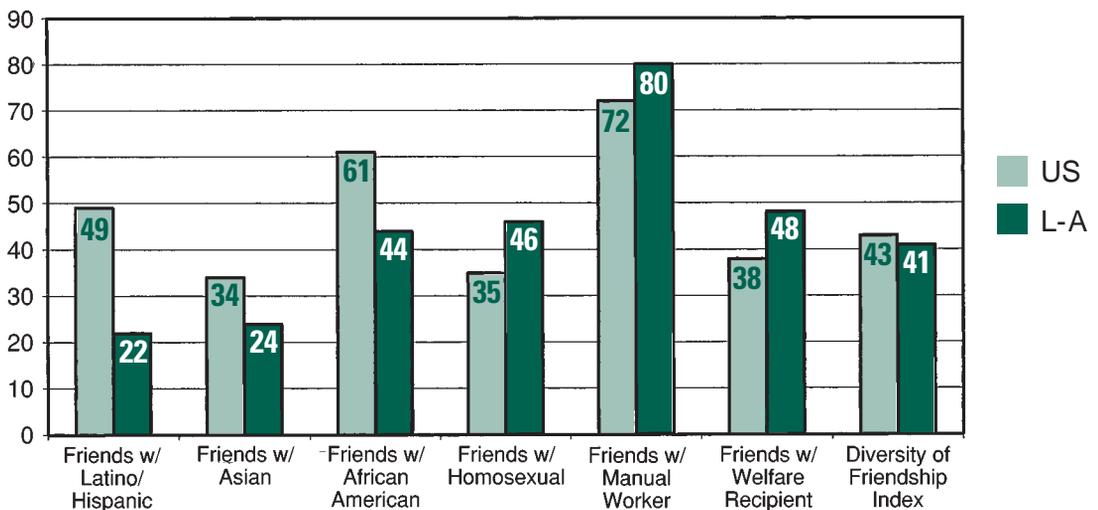
life of their community and their country.

The Maine sample also ranks higher than the national average on an index of *general social trust*, with particularly high responses on questions of *interracial trust*. This finding has critical implications, given the arrival of new immigrants in the area. It is a strength that the L-A community can build on.

Additionally, 57% of L-A respondents support immigrant rights (vs. 52% nationally). In a measurement of community tolerance, 76% (vs. 70% nationally) of respondents stated that public libraries should not be involved in censorship.

DIVERSITY INDEX

Percentages



These findings suggest that, on the whole, the Lewiston-Auburn community is tolerant, with strong support for basic democratic freedoms.

Upon closer examination, it is also the case that L-A residents are less likely than their national counterparts to have friends of different ethnicity—likely due to the lack of diversity in the local population. This is a finding that will bear close watching as the population diversifies and citizens have greater opportunity to befriend those who differ ethnically from themselves. Hopefully, the reported high *interracial social trust* factor will emerge in a manner that continues to enhance community growth and multicultural makeup.

A Willingness to Help Others

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam argues that “...social networks provide the channels through which we recruit one another for good deeds, and social networks foster norms of reciprocity that encourage attention to others’ welfare. Thus..., volunteering and philanthropy and even spontaneous ‘helping’ are all strongly predicted by civic engagement.”

It is a matter of fact that in contemporary America those of us who belong to formal and informal social networks are more likely to give our time and money to good causes than those of us who are isolated socially. For this reason, altruism is an important diagnostic sign of social capital.

Several questions in the benchmark survey measured behavior in donating money to religious and non-religious organizations and to volunteering for general causes as well as for a specific purpose, such as schools.

Charity Index		
Giving Level	United States	Lewiston-Auburn
High	35%	27%
Medium	32%	30%
Low	33%	43%

How, then, does the Lewiston-Auburn area measure up as regards its citizens’ willingness to help others? On the overall Charity Index, the L-A area respondents placed themselves less often in the medium or high level of giving groups and 10% more often at the low giving level.

Two questions related to donating money differentiated between religious and non-religious organizations. The data below show the comparison between the sample from Maine and that from the United States as a whole.

These findings indicate that Lewiston-Auburn residents are less likely to contribute to religious causes by 11%; at the same time, they are less likely to contribute more than \$500 to such causes.

As for making contributions to non-religious causes, Maine citizens roughly mirror their counterparts in the rest of the country: 60% of the L-A respondents and 57% of the national sample said that they made contributions to non-religious causes. However, while 15% of the national sample gave \$500 or more, a slightly smaller proportion, 10%, of the L-A sample gave this higher amount.

Overall, 55% of L-A area residents said they had volunteered in the past 12 months compared to 51% nationally.

Contributed to Charities				
Giving Level	Religious		Non-Religious	
	U.S.	L-A	U.S.	L-A
None	25%	36%	31%	31%
Less than \$100	12%	13%	18%	20%
Between \$100 and \$1000	30%	28%	31%	31%
More than \$1000	19%	11%	8%	9%

Volunteering Over the Last 12 Months

	U.S.	L-A
Number of times volunteered	9.5	9.0
At place of worship	79%	67%
For health care	35%	37%
For school/youth program	59%	54%
Assistance to poor/elderly	53%	55%
Arts/cultural organization	22%	20%
Neighborhood/civic group	39%	23%

Citizens of Lewiston-Auburn volunteer at about the same rate or slightly higher than citizens of the United States, except in two areas. The survey shows lower interest in, and attendance at, places of worship; there is also less charitable giving to religious organizations. The other clear difference shows up in the levels of involvement with neighborhood and civic groups: L-A residents are less likely to volunteer.

A number of socio-economic and cultural characteristics may help explain why levels of charity may be somewhat lower in L-A than in the national sample. Putnam suggests several correlates between volunteering and philanthropy. “Who among us are most generous with our toil and treasure?” he asks, then answers his own question: “Not surprisingly, well-to-do, highly educated people—those who have more personal and financial resources—are more likely to volunteer, to donate money, and to give blood. In particular, education is one of the most powerful predictors of virtually all forms of altruistic behavior, even after controlling for other possible predictors.”

The following tables corroborate the theory that education and income appear to be tied to giving and volunteering. The tables present the charity index controlled for levels of education, income and age for the Maine sample.

These tables demonstrate that those with a college education are much more likely to indicate that they contribute more and volunteer more. However, age plays out a bit differently here than on the national scene: In L-A, giving and volunteering increase noticeably between

Giving & Volunteering: Education Level

	Giving and Volunteering Index		
	Low	Medium	High
High School or less	55%	29%	17%
Some College	32%	33%	35%
College Degree	16%	29%	54%

Giving & Volunteering: Income Level

	Giving and Volunteering Index		
	Low	Medium	High
Less than \$20,000	64%	24%	12%
\$20,000 to \$30,000	42%	32%	26%
\$30,000 to \$50,000	36%	34%	30%
\$50,000 to \$75,000	32%	36%	31%
\$75,000 to \$100,000	19%	31%	50%
More than \$100,000	–	29%	71%

Giving & Volunteering: Age Level

	Giving and Volunteering Index		
	Low	Medium	High
Ages 18 to 34	47%	30%	23%
Ages 35 to 49	35%	33%	32%
Ages 50 to 64	40%	35%	25%
Ages 65 and over	50%	21%	29%

the 18-34 and 35-49 age groups, but then declines somewhat from 50 on. Further work with this data may support Putnam’s assertion by showing that on average, the older population in L-A has fewer financial resources, due in part to its lower levels of education, which would explain lower levels of giving and volunteering.

More careful examination of the data on participation in organizations provides an interesting, apparent contradiction in the area of L-A involvement in school and youth activities. *While citizens report that they volunteer for these organizations at nearly the same levels as people do nationally (54% versus 59%), they also report that they are significantly less likely to be a regular attendee or member of such organizations.* In fact, this discrepancy is also seen in the national data.

Participation in Youth & School Groups

	United States	Lewiston-Auburn
Volunteer	59%	54%
Belong/ regularly attend	22%	18.5%

This index suggests an area of focus for philanthropic activity: support of youth/school organizational service development. Research points to the importance of early intervention to enhance the lives of youth and to provide a better quality of life for all in the future.

Of particular interest to community foundations is Putnam’s suggestion that civic involvement has a great deal to do with people’s altruism. “More important than wealth, education, community size, age, family status, and employment..., by far the most consistent predictor of giving time and money,” he writes, “is involvement in community life. Social recluses are rarely major donors or active volunteers, but *schmoozers* and *machers* are typically both.” (Using Yiddish, Putnam equates *schmoozers* with informal social networking, and *machers* with organized group participants).

Total Civic Participation

	Giving and Volunteering Index		
	Low	Medium	High
None	80%	16%	5%
Low	56%	32%	12%
Medium	27%	33%	40%
High	24%	27%	50%

Organizational Activism

	Giving and Volunteering Index		
	Low	Medium	High
Low	67%	24%	9%
Medium	32%	39%	30%
High	9%	30%	55%

Do these observations hold true for Maine? Are those citizens who are more involved in their community more likely to contribute their time and money?

We looked at two variables to determine whether Putnam’s conclusions from other studies also hold true in Lewiston-Auburn. The first variable represents *civic participation*, or the degree of involvement in community affairs. The second variable considers the degree of *organizational activism*.

These tables tend to reinforce Putnam’s argument that those most involved in their communities are also those most likely to display aspects of altruism to help others by contributing money or their time.

General Social Trust

Does age make a difference in social trust? While general levels of social trust in the L-A region are high, when broken down by age, *a pattern of lower trust levels by younger respondents emerges*.

The most dramatic difference in age groups can be found between 18-34 and 35-49 year-olds. Of those in the first age group, 40.1% report their social trust is low and 59.9% respond at the medium or high levels. In the 35-49 group, social trust drops to 25.7% at the low level and 74.2% at medium or high. The 50-64 and 65+ age groups continue to trend slightly upward in social trust.

Without a longitudinal study, it is hard to determine to what extent this study outcome is due to the developmental stage of younger adults, and therefore represents a characteristic that will change in time, or whether there exists a generational difference that will follow the young into their middle and senior years.

Names of Senators Known

Names Known	None	Both Correct
Ages 18-34	42.8%	23.7%
Ages 35-49	18.0%	47.3%
Ages 50-64	20.2%	48.4%
Ages 65+	26.9%	47.9%

This divergence between the 18-34 and 35 and up population groups also appears in their responses to the political questions such as

knowledge of senators' names and interest in politics and national affairs.

There was no significant difference in organized group participation between the younger and older age group, with the exception that those in the 50-64 and 65+ groups are somewhat more likely to fall into the low, versus medium or high, categories of activity. While in general, as indicated above, the L-A community is on the low side of activity in organized groups and clubs, this finding of few differences across age groups runs counter to Putnam's thesis that group membership declines generationally.

In fact, in this metropolitan area, the findings suggest that we are losing the participation of our middle-aged and older citizens prematurely as membership decreases with age.

A not-so-surprising finding was that faith-based membership and attendance at regular church services are lower in L-A than in the national sample. This trend tracked across the New England region. The survey found stronger participation in organized religion in the south and mid-west and among blacks and Hispanics.

Analysis of all the data shows that those involved in organized religion tend to be more

Organized Interaction		
	Low	Medium/High
Ages 18-34	26%	74.2%
Ages 35-49	28%	72%
Ages 50-64	39%	61%
Ages 65+	42%	58%

conservative politically and less tolerant, e.g., not as supportive of immigrant rights and in favor of banning unpopular books from libraries. It is important to distinguish here between people who state that they belong to a church and regularly attend services and those who may hold a certain faith, but are less institutionally involved in religious expression. The latter were not examined in this study.

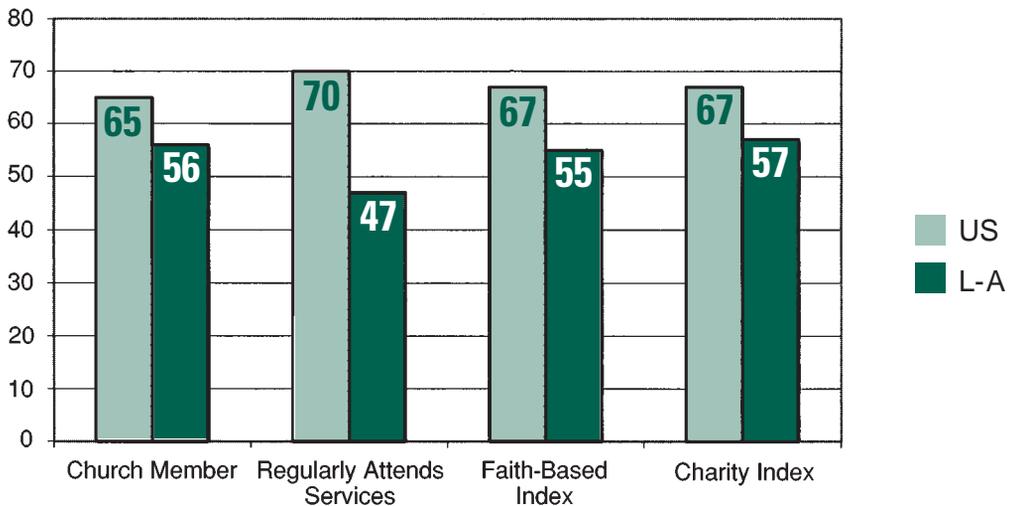
Perceived Barriers

Although the survey covered the issue of perceived barriers to participating in social capital building activities, the number of questions was limited due to survey length. Additionally, the main goal was to capture a picture of how much social capital existed at one point in time.

A partial breakdown of L-A respondents' answers to the question, "Overall, how much

FAITH & CHARITY

Percentages



impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live?” is seen below.

Perception of Impact by Sex			
	Small/ None	Moderate/ Small	Big Impact
Male	5%	71%	25%
Female	6%	59%	34%
Total	6%	65%	29%

Somewhat surprisingly, women are more likely than men to feel that making a big impact in the community is possible. By breaking down the moderate and small categories, we find that a total of 20% felt only a small impact was possible, which, combined with the “none” category, means that roughly 26% of the population perceives that only a small or no impact on their community is possible.

In comparison to the national results, the small or none category accounted for 23% of respondents—just a slight difference, but not a favorable direction for L-A. Nationally, respondents reported that they felt they could make a “big impact” in 34% of the cases—versus L-A’s 29%—and the significant difference between males and females was not apparent. *These findings suggest that if the sense of efficacy in men in L-A, in particular, was increased, the total population’s sense of their ability to impact and improve the community would rise to the national average.*

Perception of Impact by Age			
	Some/ None	Moderate/ Small	Big Impact
Ages 18-34	34%	44%	25%
Ages 35-49	21%	40%	39%
Ages 50-64	26%	53%	46%
Ages 65+	24%	46%	30%

For those who believe they have the ability to make a “big impact” in community improvement, the significant step in developing this belief happens between high school graduation

and earning at least an associate’s degree. Those respondents who graduated from college with a bachelor’s degree also differ in their perception of their ability to impact a community: They are much more likely to believe that they have at least a moderate ability to effect change, versus having only “some” or “no” impact.

This is a key finding because education is an *achieved versus an ascribed characteristic*; it is an issue that can be addressed by improvement in community education levels. The finding is reinforced by the existence of a similar relationship between education levels and perceptions on a national basis.

Several specific questions were asked regarding what factors act as obstacles to being involved in one’s community.

Obstacles That Limit Participation		
	United States	L-A
Work and childcare	52%	59%
Inadequate transportation	32%	30%
Feeling unwelcome	20%	20%
Safety concerns	40%	31%
Lack of information	34%	33%
Average hours worked	46 hours	46 hours

Clearly, the combination of childcare and work issues presents major barriers to participation in social capital activities nationally, but we find these factors have even more serious impacts in Maine. This discovery merits follow-up research to tease out that portion that is attributable to childcare needs versus that which is due to work time, demands, or pace.

The issue of inadequate transportation becomes far more important when delineated by income groups. Forty-one percent of those reporting an income of less than \$30,000 per year stated that transportation is a major obstacle, with another 13% saying it is “somewhat important.” The importance of the transportation barrier drops to 25% at an income between \$30,000 and \$75,000 and to 12% over \$75,000.

General Satisfaction

	Happy		Healthy		Community Rating	
	U.S.	L-A	U.S.	L-A	U.S.	L-A
Excellent/Good	94%	95%	86%	84%	85%	84%
Fair	5%	3%	11%	9%	13%	12%
Poor	1%	1%	4%	7%	2%	3%

Education and Community Satisfaction

	High School or less	Some College	College Degree
Excellent/Good	86%	80%	90%
Fair/Poor	13%	20%	9%

Happily, concerns about safety are less significant in Maine respondents' considerations regarding community participation than they are nationally. Related to this is the very positive finding that L-A residents are generally happy, healthy, and rate their community as a good place to live.

There is a significant correlation between both education and income and those who report good health, with those at lower levels reporting they are less healthy. Income also has some impact on the level of happiness reported. However, income has very little impact on the positive ratings of the overall community.

While those who have some college education report a slightly lower level of community satisfaction, those with a bachelor's degree or higher are the most satisfied. This finding suggests that those with higher education levels are more aware of what the community offers and/or are more able and likely to reap the benefits. Interestingly, this pattern is not found in the national data, where there is a steady positive relationship between increasing education levels and increasingly positive evaluations of the community. As an anomaly, this finding also bears further examination.

The question of whether one's city of residence provides a "sense of community or a feeling of belonging" provides us with a last—and very hopeful—glimpse of the Lewiston-Auburn metropolitan area. Here, the survey

found that 82% of respondents answered with a simple "yes" while a slightly smaller proportion, 79%, responded in this way nationally.

In preparing the survey analysis, methodologists constructed an imaginary statistical "community like yours" and made projections based on other communities with similar socio-economic situations. They found that communities that are, statistically speaking, most like L-A would have responded "yes" only 79% of the time. While this difference is not large, it is certainly a positive benchmark for a community again on the rise, such as Lewiston-Auburn.

Dr. Betty D. Robinson
Dr. Marvin Druker
Lewiston-Auburn College

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Putnam, R. 1995. "Bowling alone: America's declining social capital." *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (1), 65-78.
- Putnam, R. 2000. *Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival of the American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Skocpol, T. 1996. "Unraveling from above." *The American Prospect*, 25 (March-April), 20-25.
- Etzioni, A. 1993. *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Schudson, M. 1998. *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*. New York: Free Press.

Key Findings in Lewiston-Auburn Metro Area

- A particular strength in political civic involvement
- High levels of general social trust
- High levels of inter-racial trust
- High general satisfaction with the community
- Significant positive relationship between having a baccalaureate degree and
 - contributing more to charity
 - volunteering more often
 - being healthy
 - being happy
 - enjoying the community
- L-A women have a higher sense of efficacy in the community
- Lower sense of efficacy in the community by middle-agers (50-64 years old)
- Lower level of involvement with neighborhood and community groups than national average
- More occasional volunteering than actual membership in youth- and school-related groups
- Significant negative relationship between lower reported age and
 - general social trust
 - political civic knowledge and involvement
 - perception of having the ability to make a positive impact on the community
- Lack of transportation a barrier to community participation by those earning \$30,000 or less.

Social Capital Benchmark Survey Factoids

*Excerpted from Bowling Alone
by Robert D. Putnam*

Joining one group cuts in half your odds of dying over the next year.

Joining two groups cuts it in quarter.

Each 10 minutes of additional commuting time cuts all forms of social capital by 10 percent—10 percent less church-going, 10 percent fewer club meetings, 10 percent fewer evenings with friends, etc.

Watching TV is the only leisure activity where doing more of it is associated with lower social capital.

If you had to choose between 10% more cops on the beat or 10% more citizens knowing their neighbors' first names, the latter is a better crime prevention strategy.

If you had to choose between 10% more teachers or 10% more parents being involved in their kids' education, the latter is a better route to educational achievement.

The Internet didn't cause our civic disengagement. We were well on our way to being civically disengaged when Bill Gates was in grade school.

We're not experiencing a Springtime of volunteering, but an Indian Summer, propped up by our nation's seniors—who have been more civic throughout their lives.

We are bowling alone. More Americans are bowling than ever before, but they are not bowling in leagues.

Social capital is the best variable to successfully predict levels of tax compliance state-by-state.

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Social Capital Benchmark Survey

What is social capital?

Social capital (“community connectedness”) refers to social networks and the norms of reciprocity that arise from them. A growing body of hard-nosed literature over the last several years shows that social capital, and the trust, reciprocity, information and cooperation associated with it, enables many important individual and social goods. Communities with higher levels of social capital are likely to have higher educational achievement, better performing governmental institutions, faster economic growth and less crime and violence. The people living in these communities are likely to be happier, healthier and to have a longer life expectancy.

What is the role of community foundations?

Community foundations believe the levels of social capital in their communities are of critical importance to the overall health of the community. Community foundations are social capital builders, committed to working with all groups in their communities to deploy solutions to build their communities. The survey was designed in response to their desire to measure the overall success of communities in building social capital.

What is significant about the national findings?

For a discussion of the most significant findings from the national data and from the communities looked at as a whole, see the discussion at: www.cfsv.org/community_survey/results.html

What do you expect/hope to get out of the survey?

The survey brings broader national and community attention to the importance of social capital. It provides a tool to help

communities identify how much social capital they have currently and thus measure progress going forward. It also helps communities identify particular areas of strength they can build upon or areas of weakness to address (e.g., informal neighborliness, political engagement, volunteering/philanthropy, etc.).

How is this survey different than other polls?

This is the first survey focused on social capital, although a host of research over the past five years indicates this is a vital community resource. Moreover, it is the first major look at social capital at the local level. This survey is the largest scientific investigation of civic engagement in America.

How will the survey be used?

At the national level: Since this will be the largest dataset on social capital, it will be a useful resource for academics in the future who want to couple this data with other datasets on issues of public health, crime, economic development, education, etc. We also hope it lays the foundation for more regular measurement of social capital at the local level.

At the community level: This tool will help communities identify what their levels of social capital are compared to the national and regional averages, and measure progress going forward. As mentioned earlier, it will help communities identify concretely particular areas of strength to build on or areas of weakness to address. It will enable communities to emulate others who are strong in specific areas.

Some community foundations will also use the survey to announce a new grant-making program to increase social capital, and others will use the spotlight on social capital to convene community conversations on this topic.

How were communities selected?

The Saguaro Seminar selected a broadly diverse group of community foundations (and in rare cases other community representatives) from interested applicants.

What if my community is interested in measuring social capital?

The survey instrument is posted at: www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey/docs/survey_instrument.pdf

We encourage other communities that want to measure their social capital to find a qualified survey research or public opinion research firm to conduct the survey in your community.

20 Things You Can Do To Build Social Capital

Social capital is built through hundreds of little and big actions we take every day. We've gotten you started with a list of 20 ideas, drawn from suggestions made by many people and groups. Try some of these or try your own.

1. Organize a social gathering to welcome a new neighbor.
2. Attend town meetings.
3. Register to vote, then vote and cast your ballot.
4. Support local merchants.
5. Volunteer your special skills to an organization.
6. Donate blood.
7. Start a community garden.
8. Mentor someone of a different ethnic or religious group.
9. Tape record your parents' earliest recollections and share them with your children.
10. Don't gossip.
11. Get to know the clerks and salespeople at your local stores.
12. Attend your children's athletic contests, plays and recitals.
13. Start a monthly tea group.
14. Give to your local food bank.
15. Have family dinners.
16. Run for public office.
17. Take dance lessons with a friend.
18. Offer to rake a neighbor's yard or shovel his/her walk.
19. Join a carpool.
20. Ask a single diner to share your table for lunch.

We need to grow this list. You know what to do.

The mission of the
MAINE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
is to work in partnership with charitably minded
citizens to strengthen Maine communities.

We accomplish our mission by:

- Building permanent charitable funds
- Connecting donors to organizations and programs they care about
- Making effective grants
- Providing leadership to address community issues