

REPORT on Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey

New Hampshire people trust one another, believe they can make a difference, see few barriers to getting involved in their communities, trust their local institutions, and get involved at all income and educational levels in civic life--all to an exceptional degree. These are among the results from a groundbreaking national survey on social capital conducted last fall.

"New Hampshire **is** special," says New Hampshire Charitable Foundation (NHCF) President Lew Feldstein. "It's one thing to assume this from our own experience -- it is something else to have this confirmed by a powerful national survey. We trust each other. We believe in our ability to fix our communities. This high level of trust is a key component of New Hampshire's strong social capital."

Despite several key New Hampshire demographic factors that national experience predicts would substantially reduce civic engagement -- notably New Hampshire's very low level of religious participation, and it's very high level of people moving into the state -- New Hampshire's engagement on key dimensions of social capital is remarkably high.

Feldstein adds, "It is almost as if there is some unspoken but shared "Civic Compact" that people sign on to when they move to New Hampshire. However, there is nothing automatic or guaranteed that this level of trust and engagement will be sustained in the future. If our state is to continue to grow through new move-ins, and to be enriched by a greater diversity than we now know, New Hampshire will have to work exceptionally hard to sustain the high level of social capital that marks our lives here."

Mary Susan Leahy, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of NHCF, says, "This groundbreaking survey underscores the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation's commitment to deploying a large portion of our resources over the next decade to strengthening New Hampshire's stock of social capital. It is the single most effective investment that we can make in the health and economic prosperity of our state."

Why does this matter?

This matters because social capital is a fundamental asset of community. Social capital describes the basic building blocks of community -- trust, involvement, and connections. Harvard Professor (and part-time Jaffrey, NH resident) Robert D. Putnam has spent decades studying civic life and social capital in the United States and Europe.

A major metro daily newspaper distilled Putnam's work this way:

"People are most productive, healthiest and happiest in communities with a high degree of social cohesion....The building blocks for community cohesion can be as simple as voting; reading the newspaper; participating in athletic, social and neighborhood groups; attending church; volunteering for community activities and contributing to local charities. They can also involve more intense commitments, such as running for local office or taking a leadership role in a civic project."¹

A national magazine observed of Putnam's first book, Making Democracy Work (Princeton University Press, 1995), "Here is a book that masquerades as a routine study of Italian regional government but is actually a great work of social science, worthy to rank alongside de Tocqueville, Pareto and Weber. Mr. Putnam's tone is modest, but his ideas are bold."²

Putnam's work and a large body of social science research confirm that social capital is a powerful force for building healthier communities:

- Joining one group cuts your odds of dying over the next year in half. Joining two groups cuts it by a quarter."³

¹ San Francisco *Chronicle*

² The Economist, February 6, 1995

³ Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone, Chapter 20, "Health and Happiness," Simon and Schuster, 2000.

- 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.⁴
- 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 achievement⁵

NH is different in fundamental ways

In three key findings, New Hampshire presents a very different picture from the national data: the impact of religion and faith-based institutions, the very high percent of people who have moved into the state, and the role of class in social capital.

Religion. Nationally, faith-based social capital -- created from belonging, giving to, volunteering for and spending time at church, synagogue or mosque -- is a major factor in building social capital. Religious involvement is positively associated with most other forms of civic involvement. Even holding other factors constant (comparing people of comparable educational levels, comparable income, and so on), religiously engaged people are more likely than religiously disengaged people to be involved in civic groups of all sorts, to vote more, to be more active in community affairs, to give blood, to trust other people (from shopkeepers to neighbors), to know the names of public officials, to socialize with friends and neighbors, and even simply to have a wider circle of friends.”⁶ This survey confirms that New Hampshire, similar to the other New England states, is among the very lowest in the nation in religious activity.

When asked whether or not Religion is "very important," only 63% of NH respondents said yes, compared with 84% nationally and 79% in Communities Like Us. We have lower levels of church membership (NH at 45% compared to 58% nationally and 59% in Communities Like Us), church attendance (39% in NH attend monthly or

⁴ Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone, Chapter 18, “Safe and Productive Neighborhoods.”

⁵ Isamil Serageldin, Vice President, the World Bank, “Voices of the Poor”, The World Bank, 1996. “The study finds that a one standard increase in village –level social capital increases household income per person by 20-30 percent. By comparison, a one standard deviation in schooling – nearly three additional years of education per person – increases incomes by only 4.8%.” pg. vii.; see also Putnam, Bowling Alone, Chapter 17, “Education and Children’s Welfare.”

⁶ Findings of the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, 2001. See also Putnam Bowling Alone, pp. 65-69.

more, compared with 61% nationally and 57% in Communities Like Us), volunteering for church activities (20% in NH, compared with 28% nationally and 31% in Communities Like Us), and giving to church charities (59% in NH compared with 70% nationally and 69% in Communities Like Us). Given that New Hampshire does not enjoy the boost that would be provided by high religious participation, it is all the more remarkable that New Hampshire, on a wide variety of other indices, still scores high.

Longevity in community. People's engagement in their community is directly tied to how long they have lived in the community.⁷ Recent arrivals are less likely to vote, less likely to have supportive network of friends and neighbors, less likely to belong to civic organizations. The longer you live in a place, the more engaged you are. People who expect to move in the next five years are 20-25% less likely to attend church, attend club meetings, volunteer, or work on community project than those who expect to stay put.⁸ Conversely, those most recently arrived in a community are less involved than those who have been there longer.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, New Hampshire ranks fifth highest in terms of percentage of population growth since 1990 that is due to in-migration. New Hampshire ranks 7th highest (of the 50th states) in terms of the percentage of the population that is not native. According to the 1990 Census only 44 percent of the population was born here. Sixty-two percent of the rest of the US live in the state they were born in. New Hampshire stands out in New England--in Massachusetts and Maine the native percentage is 69%. Even Vermont, which is most similar to New Hampshire in terms of in-migration, has a 57% native population percentage. Meanwhile, New Hampshire continues to be the fastest growing state in the northeastern United States, and has ranked in the top half of states in the country for growth rate in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s.

⁷ Putnam, Bowling Alone, citing 9 articles and books on the topic and the DDB Needham Lifestyle Surveys (pg. 477)

⁸ Putnam, Bowling Alone, pg. 204

This rapidly growing and changing population presents a challenge to New Hampshire, as it works to retain its high levels of social capital.

Class. "Class" is not a word most of us in New Hampshire are comfortable with, yet social class, as measured by income and education, is one of the most powerful predictors of who gets involved civilly. The higher the education and the income of people the more likely they are to be involved civilly. Nationally, income and education have a large effect on civic engagement. The national survey found disturbingly unequal access to social capital in most American communities. Rates of political participation, social participation, social trust, and the like are quite different in different social strata. In other words, the survey uncovered the social capital equivalent of the "digital divide." Americans who lack access to financial and human capital also lack access to social capital. Quite apart from increasing the *level* of civic engagement in American communities, we need to attend to its *social distribution*.⁹

NH leads the nation in the degree to which class has almost *no* impact in determining who gets involved in civic life and social networks. We are all equally involved -- the butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers are equally involved as the doctors, lawyers and stay-at-home moms. This finding should be extremely encouraging to New Hampshire residents. In New Hampshire we have a very high rate of Social Equity in social capital.

And the finding is consistent with previous studies of New Hampshire communities. Sociologist Cynthia Duncan observed in her study of rural poverty in the Mississippi Delta, Appalachia and Northern New Hampshire:

“(in the northern NH community studied) income differences that do exist appear to have little effect on everyday lifestyles...Both the poor and the non-poor say people are not treated differently according to their income and the work they do. Those with good steady jobs see the poor as people who are having a hard time 'at the bottom of a continuum rather than on another continuum,' a social service agency director explains. 'There is no sense of isolation or of a separate culture.

⁹ see findings of National Benchmark Survey of Social Capital, 2001.

There's really no sense of class. There's a kind of bond, a membership of the valley and the region that is more important than other kinds of distinctions'." ¹⁰

The New Hampshire Difference

On the most basic measure of social capital -- trust -- New Hampshire scores high. Fifty-nine percent of NH residents say that "Most People are Trustworthy," compared with 47% nationally, and 55% in Communities Like Us." ¹¹

As we might have expected, New Hampshire's small and rural communities tend to rank even higher in trust and neighborliness and neighborhood cooperation. The survey shows that people who live in smaller communities are likely to have lived there longer and plan to stay. One challenge for NH is to maintain that sense of connectedness in a state where communities are growing rapidly and not all of us are able to or wish to live in a rural community or a small town.

While NH's overall volunteering score does not get the boost that comes in communities that have very high religiously-based volunteering, the people of New Hampshire nevertheless volunteer at the national average, as well as the average for Communities Like Us, in the following areas:

- School/youth
- Health care
- Poor/elderly
- Arts and culture
- Neighborhood and civic associations

Details ...

- Specific questions about trust elicit similar high responses. We rate above the national average the trustworthiness of our neighbors, our co-workers, our local police and, interestingly, people of other races (on this category we are among the more trusting in the nation).

¹⁰ Cynthia Duncan, Worlds Apart, Why Poverty Persists in Rural America, Yale University Press, 1999. See Chapter 3 "Equality and Civic Involvement in Northern New England," pp. 154-155.

¹¹ "Communities Like Us" is a progression analysis of computerized results based on demographic samples from the survey--these predicted scores make up a construct of community used as a baseline for comparison.

- Far more than most in this country, though comparable to communities like ours, we believe that “the people running my community really do care.”
- We are also less likely than citizens are nationally, or even citizens in communities like ours, to believe that there are barriers to getting involved. NH people dismissed each of these as barriers to getting involved: occupational, inadequate transportation, safety concerns, feeling unwelcome, lack of information, or perceived inability to effect change.¹²
- Our first in the nation primary status probably contributes to our astonishingly high percentage of people who say they have attended a political meeting or rally in the past 12 months — 25%, compared with 16% nationally and in Communities Like Us.
- Equally important, on one “hot” test issue, NH respondents were less likely than their peers nationally, or in communities like ours, to believe that libraries should not carry disapproved books. Also, NH residents are less likely than the nation to think there is something wrong in the push by immigrants for equal rights.
- The New Hampshire findings confirm the national conclusions that quality of life and happiness are highest in socially connected communities. Only 9% of NH respondents claimed fair or poor health, compared to 15% nationally and 12% in Communities Like Us. When asked whether their neighborhood is "an excellent place to live," 48% of NH respondents said yes, compared with 41% nationally and 47% in Communities Like Us.
- And, finally, confirming recent data on political polling in New Hampshire, our residents report being far less conservative than our peers in Communities Like Us.

What factors contribute to Social Capital in NH?

According to the Benchmark Survey, in addition to the faith-based factor, longevity in community and social equity, other possible contributors to NH's social capital are use of the Internet, daily newspaper reading and TV watching.

There is considerable speculation that time on the Internet comes as a direct cost of time involved with one's community. NH ranks very high in the country, and

especially among communities like ours, in the percentage of homes that have Internet access, that are on-line for six or more hours a week (19% in NH compared with 14%

¹² See also Putnam, Bowling Alone, Chapter 17, "Education and Children's Welfare"

nationally and in Communities Like Us). However, there is too little experience and research to understand the impact of the internet on the stock of social capital.

We know that reading a newspaper daily contributes to a person's engagement in his or her community. NH reports reading a newspaper 3.6 times per week compared with 3.3 nationally, and 3.5 in Communities Like Us.

There is also considerable evidence that TV watching is inversely related to civic engagement. That is, the more people watch TV the less engaged they are. NH people report watching 3.3 hours of television per day, the same as people in Communities Like Us, though the survey found national viewership at 3.8 hours per day.

Participation in activities. Activities that offer both bridging (connecting with others outside of your usual social circle) and bonding (connecting with others with whom you share many traits, interests) are a factor in contributing to high social capital. In New Hampshire, the survey shows some groups and activities with high participation and some with low. The survey asked about level of involvement in 18 different types of organizations. New Hampshire is noticeably high on sports/outdoor activity clubs (26% in New Hampshire compared to 21% nationally and 23% in Communities Like Us), literary/arts/music groups (NH– 23%; national– 17%; CLU– 16%), hobby/investment/garden clubs (NH– 30%; national– 25%; CLU– 26%), and "Other" types of groups (NH– 20%; national– 15%; CLU– 17%). NH is particularly low on non-church religious organizations (10% compared to 16% nationally and 15% CLU) and service/fraternal organizations (NH– 11%; national– 14%; CLU– 15).

On two other factors that appear to influence civic engagement – hours per week worked; and time spent commuting to work – NH's performance is virtually equal to the national norm. On hours per week worked NH is very close to the national average,

reporting 31.4 hours per week, compared to 30 nationally and 31.1 in Communities Like Us. We report a commute time to work that is identical to that reported elsewhere -- 24 minutes.

"While this survey is groundbreaking," said Feldstein, "it raises as many questions as it answers. How do we sustain and build our high trust and belief in the system? What are the effects on social capital of our low-churched state? What is the impact of the Internet? And how do we retain our high social equity in social capital. We intend to work with others to address these and the myriad of other questions that arise from this great pool of data about life in NH communities."

Background information on the design and conduct of the Social Capital Community benchmark Survey:

The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey comprises a national sample of 3,000 respondents and community respondents in 40 communities nationwide (across 29 states) covering an additional 26,200 respondents, including over 700 residents in New Hampshire. The survey covers many investigated levels of Social Capital including Social Trust, Inter-Racial Trust, Conventional Politics, Protest politics, Civic Leadership, Associational Involvement, Informal Socializing, Diversity of Friendships, Giving and Volunteering, and Faith-Based Engagement.

The 120-question survey, averaging 26 minutes, was conducted by telephone using random-digit-dialing during July – November 2000. Interviewing in the national survey and in most of the community surveys was concluded in October. Responses for each state were compared both to national averages, and to a hypothetical "Community Like Us." In addition, a "CQ" or "Community Quotient" was used. The CQ score shows a community's performance on this dimension relative to what was predicted given its urbanicity, ethnicity, levels of education and age distribution.

For more information on the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey or the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, contact NHCF at 603/225-6641, or log on to www.bettertogethernh.org.

ATTENTION MEDIA:

A password-protected site with more details, including full results and a copy of the survey questions can be reached at: www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey.