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Social Capital in Tampa Bay

An Update Report



quantifies formal and informal community networks and social trust. It's not surprising to find that our state—with high in-migration rates, increased urban sprawl and rapid growth—has limited social connections.

Furthermore, economic growth dominates the measures of business and community success often overshadowing the condition of human, natural and social well-being. In such an environment, the need to emphasize social capital and find ways to build upon it becomes pressing for all members of the community: policymakers, businesses, religious and non profit institutions, schools, families and individuals.

Beginning the Dialogue on Social Capital

In March, 2005, USF's Collaborative for Children, Families and Communities brought Harvard professor and published author, Robert Putnam to Tampa and launched a community wide dialogue on "social capital," a term Putnam made popular in his book, *Bowling Alone*.

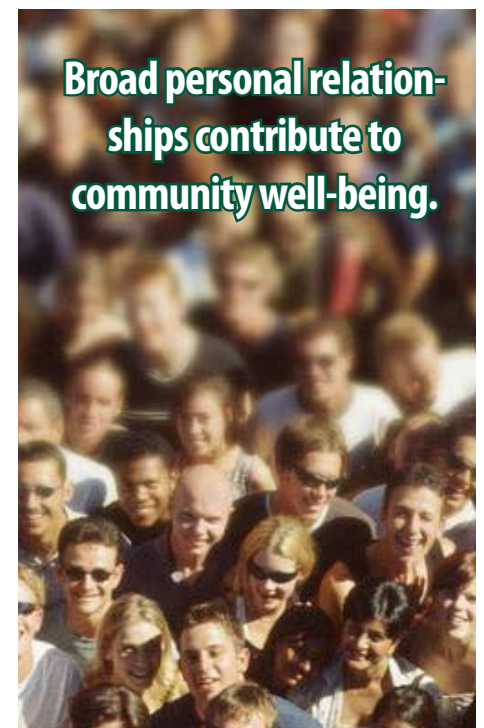
Putnam's research suggests that broad personal relationships contribute to community well-being: crime is lower, education levels are higher, children flourish and overall people are healthier and happier. In short, Putnam argues that social capital is a critical component of vibrant, innovative, diverse communities.

- Social capital is the value of the positive social connections that people can draw on to solve individual and common problems.
- Positive social connections are characterized by trust, reciprocity and mutuality, shared norms and

behavior, and a sense of commitment and belonging. Our positive social connections become our social network.

- When a person draws upon a positive social connection to assist in meeting a need or solving a problem, the positive social connection is converted into social capital.

However, Putnam warns that there has been a gradual decline in the levels of social capital throughout the United States since the mid-1970s. The state of Florida ranks 37th out of 50 on Putnam's social capital index, which is a fourteen-item tool that



Broad personal relationships contribute to community well-being.

Measures of Social Capital

How does Putnam track levels of social capital within communities? Here are a number of measures he applies:

- **Community organizational life:** percentage of people serving on committee and local organizations, as officers in clubs, attending club meetings, belonging to groups, the number of civic and social organizations per 1,000 population, and turnout at public meetings on town or school affairs;
- **Community volunteerism:** number of nonprofit organizations per 1,000 population, people working on a community project or volunteering;
- **Informed sociability and social trust:** number of times we entertain at home, time spent visiting friends, feeling that most people can be trusted and agreeing most people are honest.
- **Engagement in public affairs** is another of Putnam's indices defined in part as the percentage of registered voters participating in the last two presidential elections. While it would be desirable to collect data for the region in all of Putnam's categories, we were able to measure this one and found positive social capital growth with voter participation on the increase, Sarasota County having the highest overall voter turnout percentage. The rates are reported below:

Table 1. Voter Turnout in Tampa Bay

County	1996	2000	2004
Hillsborough	68.4%	74.0%	74.8%
Pinellas	65.5%	70.8%	77.4%
Sarasota	72.7%	73.8%	81.6%
Manatee	69.6%	65.5%	75.1%
Hernando	69.5%	68.6%	73.7%
Pasco	68.2%	66.2%	72.2%
Polk	66.1%	68.4%	71.5%

Collecting the information for Putnam's indices is time consuming, and somewhat costly, but dozens of communities across the country have done so once they recognize the value of improving their social capital. One Tampa Bay community, Venice, conducted a social capital survey in 2003, and the results can be viewed on line at <http://www.gulfcoastcf.org/page15676.cfm>. Forty other communities participated in an earlier study called the Saguaro Seminar and reports on ways they are building more community ties can be found in Putnam's book *Better Together* and on the website <http://www.bettertogether.org>.



Four Social Capital World Cafés

Just how important is social capital to our Tampa Bay region? Why does it matter if we ranked low in an index that measures turnouts at public meetings, visits to friends and local gathering spots? Isn't it enough that a community strive to be innovative, creative and hot? Do we also have to be congenial, collaborative and connected? To Richard Florida it is "Create or you die" but Robert Putnam says "Join a group and you live." What we wanted to know at CreativeTampaBay is what happens when creativity and community join together. The first order of business was to initiate a dialogue that would educate and elaborate on the importance of social capital and take a pulse re the region's sense of social connectiveness.

In June, 2005, we held four world cafes attracting more than 200 people—attendance at these gatherings were limited because of the world café format but we chose it because the format builds social capital—many in attendance made new connections they might not otherwise have made in their normal routines. The world cafes were held in downtown Tampa, at the Museum of Science and Industry in North Hillsborough County, Clearwater and downtown St Petersburg.

The café gatherings included residents from a number of different communities representing corporate employees, mothers, young people, retirees, entrepreneurs, educators, city officials and religious sectors. The breadth of participants—long time residents, newcomers, businesspeople, artists, reporters, et al convinced us that there was a lot of energy about social connections within the region. While there was general consensus in each of the cafes that individuals and communities could benefit from additional relational capital, there were diverse opinions about the reasons social capital is in short supply and lots of excellent suggestions about what could be done to change things.

CTB wants to recognize our community partners, Tampa Downtown Partnership, TECO, MOSI, Ruth Eckerd Hall, and the Studio @ 620, for their support in hosting these events. If you want to know more about the World Café construct, go to www.theworldcafe.com.

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Emerging Themes

We identified a number of themes from the specific comments of the participants and have included these below.

I. Spread the Word about Social Capital

Relationships and social networks are the basic ways humans interact—we're hard-wired to connect. Yet when Robert Putnam came to Tampa and St. Pete in March of 2005, and told us "if you belong to no groups but decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying in the next year by half," we were astounded. Even though many of us are connectors, we didn't realize how significant our behavior was. Putnam's research shows that regions with high social capital have people who are more educated, more prosperous, healthier, have lower crime and better child well-being than the rest of the country. So what can we do to build social capital in Tampa Bay?

Hold social capital world cafes in organizations throughout the region.

"Networking is the bottom line—it starts at your place of work, where you go to school, at church, in social clubs, through your neighborhood and civic associations, your chambers of commerce."—North Hillsborough
"Take some of the ideas from here back to our own centers...have some type of a social capital community summit."—St Pete
"Do something we're actually doing right now—forced socialization....we were here for 20 minutes and someone said now I want three of you to get up and go to another chair. So now I have 3 more people in front of me that I didn't choose and now I know a little bit about them and I've actually made some interesting acquaintances..."—Clearwater

Get social capital and creative economy lessons into the classroom.

"USF should take a leadership role and present continuing education and a lecture series closer to downtown."—Tampa
"Networking 101—teach younger people how to introduce themselves and get away from the computer."—North Hillsborough
"Create assignments for college students who spend a lot of time alone engaged with technology; send them out locally as part of their curriculum. Get students involved in various groups and activities to see what the real world looks like."—St Pete
"Teach kids about social capital in school so that they learn about their community and make a difference on a daily basis and incorporate this as part of our lives."—Clearwater

II. Create Ways to Welcome Newcomers into Groups

Richard Florida's Rise of the Creative Class says an essential ingredient of creative cities is being inclusive or tolerant. Creative Tampa Bay's "Young and the Restless" study conducted in 2004 said it this way, "cities that want to attract and keep smart young people must be open to newcomers as full participants in the community's civic, social and business life." World Café participants took the next step and discussed ways to accomplish this important goal.

A central clearinghouse to help people find out about community events & activities

"Equality Florida brought a large number of people together to take action toward a common cause; we need to continue to find positive ways to foster diversity."—Tampa
"People need to get to know their resources—create a central resource to help people find out about community events. List them in the TECO bill."—Tampa
"Find a way to help integrate people and connect them to various opportunities throughout the community."—North Hillsborough
"Educate people about how to get involved just so everyone is aware."—St Pete

Connecting in Tampa Bay

Attendees to the World Cafes provided a number of ways that people here connect: We're friendly, have nice weather and safe places, and host several noteworthy, long-running events such as Gasparilla and Jazz Holiday in Tampa Bay. Publix and grocery stores in general, churches and third spaces like parks and piers are other connecting places. The weather is a connector, bringing everybody out when it's nice, but also bringing people together (Hurricane parties and to clean up) when it's not so nice. Civic organizations like Verve, St. Pete 20/20, and our own CreativeTampaBay were cited for getting people involved in community planning that includes downtown and community revitalization. We feel safe at places like Baywalk, Starbucks and the Saturday Morning Market. Visitors often comment on how friendly and welcoming people are in Tampa Bay.

Shallow Roots

On the other hand participants noted that like other Americans, we are spending more time working and less time socializing; we don't know our neighbors; we face increased government restrictions and liability from lawsuits; and we spend a growing amount of time on cell phones and using other technologies which minimize face-to-face interactions. Tampa Bay's special challenges include long commuting times, limited public transportation, hot weather keeping people inside much of the year, relatively few multi-generational families, and a lack of public gathering places. To hear directly from the participants about these themes see the Emerging Themes addendum below.

CTB Summary

The principles of CreativeTampaBay are grounded within the creative endeavor—take risks, make change, reward the new and innovative, and be authentic. We have pledged to be the "stewards of creativity in our communities". Interspersed within these challenges are equally important calls to support the connectors, look to the quality of place, and embrace the diversity of vital communities. And vital communities require both creative and connective tissue.

One of the most disturbing observations from these café discussions is the recognizable lack of trust that a number of participants alluded to: they do not trust their civic leaders, their neighbors, their employers and even their own value systems. Children can no longer just go out and play without parental oversight—the sense of shared responsibility seems to be seriously lacking or diminished.

Building trust takes time. It involves taking risks and reaching out beyond comfortable barriers of safety and doing not only different things but also doing things differently.

The dialogue is just beginning and we anticipate joining in with the different constituencies of the region in moving it forward. We welcome any initiatives that will build upon the shared sense of being or trust and continue the dialogue into the community.

Networking among groups to connect residents with opportunities

“Nonprofit and cultural groups need to work more on networking and connecting instead of being in competition with each other.” —Tampa

“There are so many groups formed around the same issues; we need to coordinate our activities to reach the activation point. We need some kind of composite community forum to move forward in a united way.” —North Hillsborough
“Network between old and young people.” —St Pete

Homeowners & neighborhoods associations can play a central role

“Hold political potlucks, social potlucks...mobilize people for help with issues important to our community.” —St Pete

“Have a Walk Your Dog Day where every neighborhood, at the same time on the same day, has everyone get out an walk their dog.” —North Hillsborough

“Get all of the people in the neighborhood together and invite all of the elected officials and police officers and fire departments from the area—people you want to get to know but normally wouldn’t because there are barriers.” —Clearwater

“Groups form because of a common need or issue. Pull people together in the neighborhood to affect change.” —North Hillsborough

“In Dunedin, we do a day of good deeds—we pull together hospitals, hospice, nursing homes, all the non-profits...it’s people helping people.” —Clearwater

III. Create Public Gathering Places

The world café participants identified a need for more public commons, which may be “green” and would encourage interactions with fellow citizens. The presumption found in the World Café responses is that more attention should be given to public investments and public infrastructure. The task would be to identify how we increase market demand and then how this demand is satisfied by either public administrations or private developers.

Community Gathering Places

“We need a forum where we can discuss what’s going on in the community.” —Clearwater

“A parade and all the dogs and kids all come out and have a celebrational picnic.” —Clearwater

“We have downtown St. Pete.” —St. Pete

“We talked about how we connect in dog parks and in our neighborhoods.” —St. Pete

“There is a lack of natural gathering places in Tampa Bay.” —Tampa

“Need more green spaces. Realty prices are rising and parks are closing.” —Tampa

Sidewalks and Porches

“We talked a little bit about development and the fact that we don’t have a lot of places that are walking oriented. Street aren’t pedestrian friendly.” —Clearwater

“Rebuilding the front porch; there aren’t any front porches in America any more. People hang out in their backyards.” —Tampa

IV. Infuse Social Capital Into Existing Programs/Institutions

Participants saw particular need to build a sense of community and relationship within our schools and public institutions and day-to-day lives. “Better Together” suggests that cultural events become community institutions and artistic leaders have a strong voice in community planning. Arts are a tool that crosses cultural divides, bridging different groups with the universal language of music, theater and art.

Mentor, mix in food/drink, partner

“Mix activities with food & drink.” —St Pete

“Colleges can increase connections, especially now that they are becoming less of commuter schools and more of 4-year colleges.” —St Pete

“Friday morning is a group that gets together at the Atlanta Bread Company and brings together the arts and business.” —St Pete

“Clearwater Aquarium and Big Brothers/Big Sisters have created a very good partnership for them both because they can get more grants and other resources. We need more partnering organizations.” —Clearwater

“Mentor adults, not just kids, with people who have experience outside of their usual realm.” —North Hillsborough

“We need to be able to explain social capital to children and the elderly and integrate it into those groups...how do we get families to understand and participate?” —St Pete

“Mentoring to anyone at any age can help create connections and improvements.” —Tampa

Arts can play a pivotal role

“Do a different version of the progressive dinner for a fundraiser, like the Arts Center...get a bunch of people eating dinner, desserts, and after dinner drinks together and also supporting an arts organization.” —St Pete

“Wellness, music and transportation are connectors—put a musician or two on buses.” —North Hillsborough

“The City has a program which encouraged ethnic groups to ‘strut their stuff’ in neighborhoods—check it out and encourage them to do more.” —Clearwater

“Interactive art park, interfaith meaning all religions, invite others to the group, support the arts...would all break down the wall to reduce socioeconomic polarity.” —Clearwater

“We need a place for writers to get together and tell their stories.” —Clearwater

“Allow people from the business community to come in and attempt art on their own and allow some local businesses to provide massage therapy or manicures so that it can be a family thing.” —St Pete

V. Get Wired/Unwired

Internet use has increased dramatically over the past 10 years—according to the Pew Internet Survey, 68% of the US population is on-line and in the under-30 crowd the number is 84%. We’ve move from a society of densely-knit and tightly-bounded groups to sparsely-knit and loosely-bounded networks. Today’s American teens live in a world enveloped by communications technologies; the internet and cell phones have become a central force that fuels the rhythm of daily life. This has profound implications for how people mobilize and how people relate to each other—technology can be both a help and a hindrance to social capital.

“Come up with a mobile technology in neighborhoods.” —St Pete

“In today’s technological age, the internet can be used to bring people together rather than be used as a solitary activity.” —Tampa

“Take advantage of technology with a blog or online message board, finding friends who have similar interests.” —St Pete

“Shut off the cell phone and the email and drop in on someone.” —Tampa

VI. Adopt a Personal Picnic Perspective (what individuals can do)

This theme may be the most essential, since in aggregate, all of the work to build social capital is one to one - individual to individual. The scale is small and therefore less able to be organized and measured. Metrics should be identified to show where we are with this “personal” effort and share what is happening in our community. Encourage the behavior by examples.

Potluck dinners/events with food—Host wine tasting in you home

“Parties. Need more parties, maybe block parties.” —Clearwater

Create social gathering with people who normally may not get together

“Create community tables at restaurants where anyone who wants to can come in to network or talk and get to know other people.” —North Hillsborough

“Fear is at the root of isolation.” —Tampa

“We need to improve ourselves first...everyone needs to do their part. Don’t wait for people to invite you in, make the initiative yourself.” —Tampa

“Invite a stranger to lunch. Go to a restaurant and when you see someone alone, just talk to them.” —Clearwater