

Building Social Capital

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Exercises to help identify social capital within groups and between groups working toward a common goal.

When you want to get something done in the community, you talk to people. Decisions are made and acted on by individuals who interact with each other. What ultimately gets done depends on the quality of the relationships.

Bringing groups together means developing and maintaining relationships that allow people to work together and share resources in spite of differences. This truly builds a community’s capacity to address difficult public issues in a productive, solution-based way.

Groups can form between individuals, an individual and a group, or between two or more groups of people. The important point to remember is that the relationships that are built need to be based on:

- Trust — the belief in and reliance on the honesty, integrity, and reliability of the other party
- Reciprocity — a mutual, fair benefit from the relationship over time
- Durability — lasting over time through stress and changing circumstances

Our ability to work together tomorrow depends a lot on how we treat each other today. When one needs agreement or support from another individual or organization with whom they have no connection, they can reach them through people they do know and then get them to influence that individual or organization. The more extensive and diverse the networks are in a community, the more effective this method can be.

It is important to remember that community action takes place through human relationships. These relationships flow through two types of networks, **bonding** and **bridging**.

Bonding networks are most often groups with a similar interest, gender, or ethnicity. These groups tend to know a lot about each other and have a great deal of trust among the members. They are built on long-term relationships that can weather the storms of time.

Bridging networks connect diverse individuals and groups so they can work together, most often on an issue of mutual interest. The people involved do not know each other as well as in bonding networks. However, it is important for bridging networks to develop *reciprocity*, *trust* and *durability* so actions can end in concrete results. Many times the intensity and duration of the issue-related work will enable the group to bond. However, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to create opportunities for bonding to happen.

Mapping Your Social Capital

Doing a detailed analysis of your group’s social capital will help you develop strategies for working with key stakeholders and mobilizing resources throughout the community.

Social capital comprises the relationships that make resources available for your community initiative, including the larger networks that you can access through those relationships. This tool will help you create a clear picture of those relationships and networks.

The social capital mapping exercise below is designed to be done either by an individual or by a group. Either option will help create a map of connections and networks — a table listing who you know, the type of tie you have to the person or network, and the resources that each person can access.

1. List the relevant groups and organizations: Give each group member a copy of the Social Capital

Map (Page 3) and ask them to fill in the group or organization column. In this column, people should list all the groups with which they have a link as a general member, board member, staff member, volunteer, client, or customer. If any of your members have a personal connection with a group's leaders, that group also should be listed here.

2. Determine the strength of the ties: Ask each of your members, working individually, to complete the Strength of Tie column by writing an **S** for those groups with which they think they have a strong tie or a **W** for those groups with which they think they have a weak tie.

Strong ties = higher levels of trust, reciprocity, and durability

Weak ties = lower levels of trust, reciprocity, and durability.

3. Determine the resources represented: Still working individually, each group member should now fill out the resources column. Resources can include money, information, votes, volunteers, and access to other groups and networks.

4. Combine the individual lists: For this step, display the combined social capital of your group members in a visual way. Some groups use a spreadsheet software program for this purpose. Others create a tally sheet on pieces of flip chart paper hung side-by-side on a wall. Whatever technology you use, make the display large enough to be seen by the entire group.

The format that most groups use for their map is a grid with space to list each group member's name in the left-hand column and groups or organizations across the top of the grid.

	<i>School</i>	<i>Lions</i>	<i>NRCS</i>	<i>Hospital</i>
Juan	S	W		S
Alice		W	W	

You may wish to try some variations on this step:

- Create a large grid and then fill it in as a group. Ask each of your members to state the groups with which they are linked and the strength of each tie. Your facilitator can record this information on the grid.
 - Use colored circles or squares to represent the strength of the tie
 - Fit this step into a meeting break. Group members can leave the room after writing their individual information on the grid.
5. Analyze the map: When your map is finished, analyze it by answering the questions included in the next section — **Increasing Social Capital**
 6. After your group has finished mapping its social capital, discuss how and when you will use the results. Choose what actions you will take in response to the questions. It is especially important to discuss how you will strengthen ties, build new ties, and leverage existing ties to increase social capital.

Increasing Social Capital

1. What resources do your strong ties give you access to?
2. What resources do your weak ties give you access to?
3. Are there ties you want to strengthen? If so, how will you strengthen them?
4. Are there relevant groups with which you lack social capital (that is, they do not appear on your map)? How will you access the resources of these groups?
5. How can you leverage your ties to have access to more groups, organizations, and resources?

Social Capital Map

<i>Group or Organization</i>	<i>Strength of Tie</i>	<i>Resources</i>

Resource

Adapted from: Krile, J. (2006). *The community leadership handbook*. Blandin Foundation. Published by Fieldstone Alliance (formerly Wilder Publishing Center).

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