

Immigrants and Civic Engagement

BY CRAIG MCGARVEY

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The immigrant members of the Women's Leadership Group of the Tenants' and Workers' Support Committee (TWSC) in Alexandria, Virginia, came together regularly to discuss community concerns and the needs of women. Using a technique of popular education to bring issues to the surface, they drew pictures of community life as they experienced it.

Catalina's drawing of her children playing in the street struck an immediate chord among the group and sparked conversation about the lack of recreational space for young people in their neighborhood.

With TWSC's encouragement, the women moved from problem identification to analysis and strategies that could lead to positive change. They decided to document the conditions, creating a map of all of the playgrounds and outside barbecue grills available to the nine thousand Arlandia residents. They found two of the former (both small), one of the latter. They made a similar map of adjacent, middle-class neighborhoods of single-family homes. The contrast was dramatic.

Next came research. The women studied the budget of the Alexandria Parks and Recreation Department; in the study they received support from TWSC staff, but the research was their responsibility. They found \$75,000 that had been set aside but not yet used for tennis courts.

Armed with this information and their maps, the women sought a meeting with the director of parks and recreation. As a result of their ongoing advocacy, over the next few years Parks and Recreation made more than \$100,000 in improvements to Arlandia: a new playground, two new public grills, and a multipurpose playing court.

TWSC is one of a growing number of nonprofit groups, charities, and organizing efforts that are dedicated to the goal of engaging recent immigrants in American civic life. This democratic experience of participating with others to solve community problems strengthens immigrants, the communities in which they live, and the democracy itself.

Through civic participation organizations, newcomers

- Educate themselves, developing their human capital through acquisition of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior
- Build networks of trusting relationships with those from like and unlike backgrounds, developing the "bonding" (with the former) and "bridging" (with the latter) social capital that sociologist Robert Putnam has argued to be essential to healthy communities
- Contribute to positive outcomes of social change
- Integrate into American society, a process by which they reinvigorate the democracy by participating in it (as did the ancestors of the native born)

Based in community centers or churches, unions or worker centers, neighborhoods or broader communities, civic participation efforts include nationally affiliated networks and locally created organizations. Some are ethnicity-centered, some not. Some

blend provision of services or advocacy with their civic participation work. All share a commitment to engaging and empowering immigrants and others through collective problem solving in the democratic process.

The Demographic Imperative

There is scarcely a state, city, town, or person in the United States unaffected by the demographic changes our country has experienced owing to immigration in recent decades. The foreign-born population increased by almost 1.6 million, or approximately 5 percent, in 2001 alone, continuing the record-breaking volume of the 1990s, when more than 13 million immigrants entered the country.

Approximately 34 million of us, about one in nine, were born outside the United States. Although the traditional receiving states of California, Texas, Illinois, Florida, New Jersey, and New York continue to attract large numbers, newcomers are now everywhere. In the thirty-seven states never before considered as immigrant destinations, the foreign-born population during the 1990s grew at twice the rate of these six historic gateways.

As has been true throughout the history of immigration to the United States, some of these new neighbors have come here to escape persecution in their homeland. Some have sought to reunify with family members. All have come to make a better life for their families through hard work.

Like those who preceded them, newcomers have become integral to the economy, where they are making important contributions. Immigrants accounted for half of all new entries into the U.S. labor force in the 1990s, fueling growth in many industries and, according to a 1997 National Academy of Sciences study, adding approximately \$10 billion annually to the U.S. economy.

Immigrants are reinvigorating communities. In their book *Comeback Cities*, Paul Grogan, presi-

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dent of the Boston Foundation and former executive director of Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and foundation consultant Tony Proscio specifically cite newcomer consumers and investors for their contribution to the renewal of the American inner city. "Immigration is the single most important factor for dividing winning cities from losing cities," says Grogan.

Rural communities have been similarly transformed. For example, the increase in the Latino worker population from 4 percent in the early 1990s to almost 25 percent in 2000 reversed economic decline in the dairy town of Yuma, Colorado, creating new businesses and increasing car sales, consumer loans, and property values.

Elections and Beyond

Immigrants are also reinvigorating the political landscape. Between the elections of 1996 and 2000, as the number of naturalized citizens grew, the foreign-born voting group increased by 20 percent. These immigrants and refugees are establishing themselves as important swing voters, representing great diversity of political outlook across class and generation and within generic ethnic categories.

Beyond casting ballots, newcomers are increasingly active broadly in electoral politics, from registering voters to running as candidates. Approximately one hundred immigrants and refugees now hold state-level elected office across the country.

But the contributions of newcomers in civic participation do not necessarily start or end with elections. Through collective problem solving, immigrants are making a difference at the community and policy levels.

To take an example, newcomers—one in four of California's population—have joined actively with the native-born in the PICO California Project of the Pacific Institute for Community Organization, which draws together seventeen PICO affiliates from throughout the state to add the voices and concerns of regular Californians to statewide policy improvement. Organizing in more than seventy cities and more than half of the state senate and assembly districts, the California Project represents approximately 350 congregations and four hundred thousand families.

Each of the seventeen PICO affiliates is a collaboration of congregations promoting civic participation among residents. While continuing to work together locally on issues, through the California Project members collectively identify statewide concerns and develop skills and strategies to move policy in the state capital of Sacramento.

In 1999, health care was the issue that bubbled up from members and coalesced for the project. An increasing number of participating families lacked access to basic care and were among the seven million uninsured Californians. The health care campaign was launched when more than three thousand PICO members visited the State Capitol on May 2, 2000.

Since that time the statewide policy improvements in which PICO members played a role have included simplification of Medi-Cal reporting, bringing health coverage to five hundred thousand additional families and children, an increase of \$50 million to build and expand community clinics, a commitment to use the \$400 million annual state share of the tobacco settlement for programs in health care, a \$10 million increase in annual funding for primary care clinics, and approval by the federal government of the state's waiver request to add three hundred thousand uninsured parents to the Healthy Families program.

In their separate education campaign, members of the PICO California Project helped to add \$50 mil-

lion to after-school programs in low-income California neighborhoods and won \$30 million for the country's first teacher home-visit program. They worked with the state treasurer to increase California's low-income housing tax credit by \$20 million and, targeting one hundred thousand infrequent voters in a get-out-the-vote campaign, helped pass a statewide proposition for \$2.1 billion to fund affordable housing.

To accomplish these goals, PICO California Project members have learned, among many other skills, how to develop and maintain strong working relationships with elected representatives on both sides of the aisle and at all levels of government.

An Age-Old American Story

The story of such immigrant civic participation is the story of America. It was immigrants and their descendants whom Alexis de Tocqueville was observing in the early nineteenth century when he wrote, in *Democracy in America*, that "Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of dispositions are forever forming associations . . . of a thousand different types. . . . Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention."

The Progressive Era, during which so many of the twentieth century's voluntary civic associations were created, coincided with the last great wave of immigration to the United States (almost twenty-seven million newcomers arrived between 1870 and 1920). Some of these associations (for example, the settlement houses) were intended to assist immigrant integration. Others were created by immigrants themselves. Not all were related to or favorable toward newcomers. But clearly the explosion of creativity in civic life was associated with the dramatic demographic and accompanying economic changes taking place in America at the time.

We may well be in the midst of another such explosion in civic creativity. There is no denying that rapidly increasing diversity has stretched our social

fabric. Discrimination, injustice, and miscommunication across cultures create cynicism and isolation that can be passed to future generations. Immigrants face formidable structural barriers to participation, in particular long working hours, low pay, and lack of formal education slowing their acquisition of English. The post-September 11, 2001, political climate has severely set back newcomer integration.

But stressful times can stimulate social inventiveness. From local community activism to electoral campaigns, immigrants at the beginning of the new century are participating in civic life in ways that are as dynamic and diverse as the newcomers themselves.

Foundations and Civic Participation

Strong community organizations with well-designed programs serve as the crucial portal of engagement for these newcomers, organizations built upon the democratic belief that sustainable social improvement can be achieved only when those experiencing problems are involved in learning how to solve them. In the country's changing demographic landscape, such institutions have drawn increasing interest from foundations with many priorities.

- Foundations with categorical interests in improvement of health, education, youth, employment, and other key issues are successfully using strategies of active engagement (parents in their children's schools, health *promotoras* in the community) to achieve positive outcomes.
- Foundations seeking systemic policy reform in these areas are finding immigrant civic participants to be important allies who care greatly about the issues and play an important role in winning policy change.
- Foundations with interest in improving intergroup relations, building community, and reviving civic life are actively involving our foreign-born population (11 percent and growing), drawing on their strengths and assets to address these persistent community challenges.

- Foundations devoted to the preservation of worker, civil, and human rights are augmenting their efforts by engaging immigrants in the struggle, promoting both the responsibilities and the rights of newcomer participation in community life.
- A growing number of foundations interested in improving social conditions of any kind are recognizing that communities at large as well as newcomers have a stake in immigrant civic participation; they are realizing that, in the absence of engagement and integration, the isolation of newcomers can only lead to greater problems.
- Irrespective of funding priorities, many foundations are increasingly recognizing immigrants and refugees as a key population to which they must respond. Many are asking important questions about how grantee organizations are engaging newcomers in their work and integrating this growing population into the broader community.

Foundations with historic interest in newcomers have led the way in supporting civic participation. For example, the Hyams Foundation's commitment to immigrants and refugees goes back to its origins in the 1930s, when one of the Hyams sisters started a settlement house in East Boston modeled on Chicago's Hull House.

Hyams developed the Immigrant and Refugee Leadership Development Initiative (IRLDI), with a special focus on immigrant communities within its civic participation and community organizing portfolio. The initiative's ultimate aim is "to build power among immigrants and refugees in order to improve the lives of immigrants in Boston through greater access to services, sustainable employment, affordable housing, and other areas critical to create a thriving community."

To reach this goal, IRLDI sought to build the capacity of immigrant-led organizations to strengthen leadership in immigrant communities. Civic participation is both an intended outcome and a strategic approach of the initiative.

The initiative's guiding principles for participating organizations include development of leaders committed to civic participation, broad demonstration of the benefits of civic participation, inclusion in training of experiential opportunities to exercise leadership, involvement of emerging leaders in planning and implementing projects, equal inclusion of participants from varying educational and economic backgrounds, and exploration of cultural barriers to (and opportunities in) leadership development.

Similar principles guided the initiative's work with participating organizations. Building capacity through engagement, IRLDI asked each of the six original grantees (representing Chinese, Latino, Somali, and Vietnamese constituents) to develop its own capacity-building work plan involving board and staff members. Consultants, acting as organizers, facilitated this collective internal work, helping to build relationships, participation, and ownership, modeling leadership development as staff and board leaders developed. The consultant-organizers played the same role in drawing the six organizations together for collaborative learning sessions.

IRLDI's first phase, from 2000 through 2002, focused on the internal leadership development and organizational change necessary to engage and build grassroots community leaders. In 2003, phase two turned attention to constituent leadership development. Hyams, which has committed \$450,000 to the initiative, is building from this experience to tackle a next challenge: recruitment and retention of organizers of color.

Learning Together

Backed by grant-making organizations such as Hyams, civic participation organizations are built upon the democratic belief that sustainable social improvement can be achieved only when those experiencing problems are involved in learning how to solve them.

Through the experience of making and implementing plans together, immigrants educate themselves, developing skills and knowledge, and building self-esteem, individual voice, and personal identity. As they learn, participants deepen their analyses of problems, while sharpening and strengthening their strategies of solution. The group working this year to stop the closing of the local health clinic will be negotiating the budget with city council next year, and registering voters and campaigning for statewide reform of health care delivery the year after that.

Civic participation organizations also work intentionally to help newcomers build trusting relationships with those from different backgrounds. When the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment was started in South Los Angeles in 1990 by Karen Bass, an African American who had grown up in the neighborhood, two things were clear. The coalition wanted to build a base of membership through neighborhood organizing, knocking on doors. Coalition members knew that the people opening those doors represented a dynamically changing demographic: longtime African American residents, joined by an increasing number of newcomers, among them Latinos from Mexico and Central America and blacks from Central America and the Caribbean.

The issue that first drew these diverse residents together—reduction in the number of “nuisance” motels and liquor stores in their neighborhoods—was further complicated by ethnic relations. At the time, many of the motels were owned by Pakistanis, many of the liquor stores by Koreans. Some black residents viewed Korean merchants as ruthless. (The then-recent killing of a young African American by a Korean merchant, and the subsequent acquittal of the perpetrator, had enraged the community.) Some Latinos hired by local merchants felt exploited.

To get beyond emotion to analysis, beyond race to systemic issues, a great deal of education of the multicultural membership was necessary. Members studied the history of the neighborhood: as blacks

had first entered South Los Angeles, it was their businesses that current residents wanted to close down. Latino workers were reminded that they were also exploited by Latino employers. Economic analysis enabled members to understand that a motel making a marginal profit might be tempted to rent rooms by the hour; a liquor store in a similar situation might be tempted to sell alcohol to minors.

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Broad outreach and adaptability were also necessary. Before launching its campaign, to minimize ethnic tensions the coalition created a task force with Asian leadership in the city. The morning after the task force held its first meeting, Los Angeles erupted into the flames of civil unrest that followed the Rodney King verdicts. Once the smoke settled, the goal of the campaign evolved into providing alternatives to rebuilding. Coalition members worked with owners and the city to develop incentives, including waiving fees (as much as \$100,000) for connection to the sewage system for liquor stores that would reopen as laundromats.

Not every issue taken on by the coalition has successfully drawn immigrants and African Americans together. Karen Bass cautions that, even if the issue is right, constant attention must be paid to counter discriminatory attitudes. Latinos don't tend to think of Caribbeans as immigrants, for example, and African Americans don't tend to think of them as blacks. As they work together, she says, "People need to learn the facts about race, racism, and demographics." These topics, along with economic and social analyses of Los Angeles, constitute the evolving popular education program that the coalition couples with its organizing campaigns.

Raising the Barn

Americans have two dominant cultural metaphors for our democracy. One is the town hall meeting, where our ancestors gathered to deliberate and make public decisions. The image carries an implication of cultural homogeneity; people participated because their grandparents had. But if your grandparents grew up in the mountains of Laos, and mine in the mountains of Mexico, what then?

The metaphor for American cultural diversity is the barn raising. On the frontier, people who had come from many backgrounds gathered to build one another's barns. I was motivated to help you because I needed your help on my barn. Together, we raised good barns. We also learned how to build barns, and we learned to know one another through the shared experience.

Newcomer civic participation is barn-raising democracy. The problem the immigrant wants to solve motivates participation in collective problem solving. Together, civic participants improve community conditions. Through the shared experience, they educate themselves and build trusting relationships with one another, becoming a part of the broader society.

A few fundamental principles are in play:

- *Engagement is paramount.* Newcomers are encouraged to engage in all aspects of community problem solving.
- *Participation starts where the newcomer starts.* More than likely, this begins with working on issues that affect their daily lives, not in a voting booth or a political campaign (though elections are the way to get there).
- *Education informs all.* Learning is at the core of program design.
- *Relationship matters.* Building relationships with people from different backgrounds is a central program component.

Democracy is its own integrating force, and the community organizations putting these principles into action represent democracy at work. The global conditions that have changed the country's demography so dramatically are not going away. As this change continues, simultaneously testing our ideals and increasing our assets, foundations with many interests have reason to consider investment in newcomer civic participation.

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Immigrant Civic Engagement: New Translations

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On virtually a daily basis, American news media feature stories about immigrants. Many of these stories touch on questions about the balance between immigrants' civil rights and responsibilities, the extent to which they are a cost or benefit to local communities and society in general, and the nature of their commitment to the United States and American values. Recently, too, there seems to have been an increase in news stories about immigrants entering into the public debate through various forms of civic engagement, ranging from public marches to local community projects to student walkouts to lawsuits against state and federal agencies.

This special issue of *Applied Developmental Science* (ADS) spotlights civic engagement in immigrants, with an emphasis on immigrant youth whose engagement is important not only in the present but also in the future. Although the social sciences include research on immigrant youth, much of it has focused on academic achievement and family relations. Much like the research in the broader field of youth development, attention to civic development and engagement is missing. At the same time a national political debate is taking place about immigration, citizenship, and what it means to be "American." This ADS issue brings a set of fresh interdisciplinary perspectives to the discourse on immigration and civic engagement by reframing the meaning of civic engagement and casting it within the contexts of the lives of different immigrant groups.

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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

The disciplinary homes of the scholars in this volume are diverse, including anthropology, human development, political science, and sociology. Consequently, the authors bring diverse research questions, theories, and methods to the topic of immigrant civic engagement. For example, there is the demographic question of how levels of civic engagement for immigrants compare to those of nonimmigrant Americans. Lopez and Marcelo compare the survey responses of random samples of first-and second-generation immigrants and nonimmigrant Americans. Also, Stepick, Stepick, and Labissiere compare the questionnaire responses of three generations of immigrants (first, 1.5, and second generation) to nonimmigrants residing in Florida.

There is also the anthropological question of the cultural institutions and events that promote or hinder civic engagement. Here, Stepick et al. complement their questionnaire data with longitudinal data from participant observations, interviews, and focus groups in order to reveal when immigrant youth in their study feel excited about politics and community involvement and when they are turned off. They discuss institutional contexts such as school and religion as well as specific events such as the Elián González case.

Then there is the psychological question of the internal motives and identifications that underlie civic engagement or the lack thereof. In this volume, Junn and Masuoka take an approach that is not typical for political scientists. On the basis of interviews and an experiment, they look at the links between politics and positive identifications with being Asian or Latino. Focusing more on contested aspects of identity, Wray-Lake, Syvertsen, and Flanagan draw on open-ended questionnaire responses to explore the connections between perceptions of social exclusion,

experiences with prejudice, and dissociation from an American identity in a sample of immigrant Arab adolescents. Also in this volume, Jensen empirically tests Huntington's (2004) claim that immigrants who maintain a cultural identity will pull away from engagement in American civic life. Based on in-depth interviews with immigrants from El Salvador and India, this study examined how often they spoke of cultural motives to account for their civic engagement or disengagement, and it detailed the specific nature of these cultural motives of engagement and disengagement.

Taken together, then, the present articles draw on a broad range of literatures to ask fresh research questions about civic engagement in immigrant youth. They also offer a fruitful blend of quantitative and qualitative scientific methods to answer those questions.

RETHINKING DEFINITIONS

What counts as civic engagement? All too often the answer to this question is narrowly conceived. Engagement is defined by conventional indicators of electoral politics—voting, participating in party-based politics, and staying informed about current events. By and large, this leaves both immigrants and anyone under the age of 18 out of the picture. In the case of immigrants, their varied legal statuses and cultural norms add further complexity to the question.

All authors in this volume adopted a broad perspective on what constitutes civic engagement, including not only involvement with the political and legal spheres but also more general involvement with others in the community (e.g., Flanagan, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002). The present findings bear out that a broad perspective yields new insights. For example, Stepick et al., Junn and Masuoka, and Jensen uncover civic behaviors where immigrants draw on their bicultural skills (such as translating for elders and completing immigrant work permits), as well as their bicultural consciousness (such as acting upon democratic opportunities more available in the United States than in their country of origin and sending remittances to families or others in their country of origin).

Collectively, then, the articles here help us to rethink the question of what counts as civic engagement by giving explicit consideration to the sphere of engagement (such as U.S. politics, a local community group, or the

country of origin), the form of engagement (such as voting, marching, or tutoring), those with whom one joins in engagement (such as fellow immigrants or school peers), and the purposes of engagement (such as within-group solidarity or bridging across groups).

DIVERSE RESEARCH DIMENSIONS

The scholars in this volume point to the importance of numerous research dimensions. Here, we will preview six. When it comes to the civic engagement of immigrants, it is important to take into account the following: (a) socioeconomic factors (Lopez & Marcelo), (b) immigrant generation (Lopez & Marcelo; Stepick et al.), (c) age or development (Jensen), (d) country or culture of origin (all authors), (e) local or national occurrences such as the Elián González case or September 11 (Stepick et al.; Wray-lake et al.), and (f) changing relations between sending and receiving countries (Wray-Lake et al.). One way broadly to sum up these dimensions is to point out that civic engagement for immigrants is related to both individual and group characteristics, and it is related to both local and global phenomena.

This volume concludes with commentaries by three prominent scholars, Peter Levine, Rubén Rumbaut, and Mary Waters. They situate the present topic within a broader discussion of civic engagement in general (Levine) and migration research (Rumbaut and Waters). They also affirm the need for more research on immigrant civic engagement to inform the broader and virtually daily public discussions of immigration and the polity.

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Exploring Social Capital and Civic Engagement to Create a Framework for Community Building

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Community building is emerging as an increasingly important intervention strategy for neighborhood revitalization efforts across the country. This article proposes a framework that models 5 components that the author argues comprise the community building process: resident engagement, agenda building, community organizing, community action, and communications and message development. The article is intended to make community building more comprehensible as a field of work and study and more replicable as an intervention strategy.

Unlike other contributions to this volume, the discussion that follows does not address youth directly. It focuses, instead, on the fabric of community as the ecological backdrop for youth development and youth participation. In particular, our discussion focuses on community building as the foundation for community-empowered change.

The article is written in the belief that positive youth development is the responsibility of entire communities, not just of parents and youth development professionals—and that the phrase “community youth development” refers to the positive engagement of parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, and even passersby in creating the programs, opportunities, and supportive neighborhood environments that young people need.

The question, however, is how. How can communities effectively organize and assert themselves to affect positive results for their children, their families, and their neighborhoods? To address this question, we propose a framework that we believe will make community building more concrete and comprehensible as an approach to resident-driven community improvement. The framework is put forward in a “generic” form. The processes it outlines can be applied across a variety of community concerns, be they matters of safety, housing, policing, or traffic patterns. In the context of this volume, however, readers are advised to consider both: how this framework might be applied to youth development as a community agenda item; and how youth might be involved as participants in, as contributors to, or even as initiators of these processes.

Background

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *citizenship* as the status of a citizen with its duties, rights, and privileges. This article is written to explore an emerging expression of those duties, rights, and privileges as applied in the new change strategies being pursued by increasing numbers of neighborhoods and communities in the United States. Responding to our decades-old and largely failed history of narrowly designed, problem-focused, government-sponsored social interventions, communities are increasingly exploring improvement strategies that are more local, that are more comprehensive, and that encourage the involvement of community residents.

Community building is a term being used to describe this new approach. It is guided by two fundamental beliefs—that the community or neighborhood is the appropriate focus for revitalization efforts; and that enhancing the capacity of communities to engage and support residents is essential to success (Stone, 1996). Community building assumes that associations within a geographic area are important for community well-being; that bringing together a broad spectrum of stakeholders will provide a better understanding of problems; that sustainable solutions are based on knowing the facts, building on assets, and having a shared vision of improvement; and that an independent community-based capacity for analysis, planning, and convening is essential for success (Walsh, 1997).

As such, this new “field” of work is supported by the best traditions of democracy and citizenship. The challenge, however, is figuring out how to exercise these beliefs. How does one enhance a community’s ability to engage its residents and sustain their involvement in an effective community improvement effort?

Currently, the approach is to meet communities on their own terms. Initiative sponsors start where the communities are—identifying, and then building on, the as-

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sets and structures that are already there to build new and increased capacities for resident engagement, self-determination, and change. This approach respects the organic and unpredictable nature of community processes. However, to be successful in the long term, community building needs to establish a framework—a set of axioms, hypotheses, or principles that can provide a common language and guide its actual practice.

In the following, we will present such a framework, drawing heavily on notions of social capital and civic engagement. More precisely, we will argue that community building must begin by building relationships between community residents and that the social capital embedded in those relationships can be used to improve the welfare of both residents and the community. Subsequently, we will demonstrate how these relationships can be channeled for civic purposes and organized and sustained for community efficacy. The social capital construct is our starting point.

Social Capital: What Is It? And How Is It Created?

Robert Putnam's 1995 article, "Bowling Alone," catapulted the concept of social capital into the mainstream of popular language, public discourse, and policy debate. The construct is enjoying immense popularity. It has high face validity. It embodies many of the attributes normally associated with American democracy including trust and individual and group efficacy. It also has the benefit of political correctness and political expediency: The poor are not powerless to change their circumstances.

With all of this appeal, social capital is increasingly being used as an explanation for almost any positive outcome of individual socialization and socializing behavior. In fact, concern for its over-application led Alenjandro Portes to protest that, "the point is approaching at which social capital comes to be applied to so many events and in so many different contexts as to lose any distinct meaning" (Portes, 1998). It is therefore important that we clarify what we mean by the term.

Portes (1998) attributed the first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital to Pierre Bourdieu (1985), who defined the concept as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." This definition suggests that social capital has two parts: the relationships that allow individuals access to resources possessed by others, and the amount and quality of the resources themselves.

James Coleman and Robert Putnam are perhaps the two best-known proponents of social capital in the United States. Coleman's work stated, "Social capital

is created when relations among people change in ways that facilitate action" (Coleman, 1988). Putnam, by contrast, believed that "social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1995).

From these interpretations we can infer several things. The first is that social capital is an asset representing a collection of resources. The second inference is that these resources are embedded in relationships, and the third element is that social capital is directed and purposeful. We will combine these insights into a unifying definition: *Social capital is an asset representing actionable resources that are contained in, and accessible through, a system of relationships.*¹

Civic Engagement as a Precursor to Social Capital

In "Bowling Alone," Putnam explored the role of social capital through discussions of civic engagement in the United States. As examples of civic engagement, he cites voter turnout, reading the newspaper, participation in such public forums as PTAs, and in such private organizations as choral societies and bowling leagues. These examples suggest that, to qualify as civic engagement, behaviors neither have to involve others, be organized in any particular way, nor be directed at any particular action, goal, or outcome. They can proceed as independent and autonomous behaviors of individuals. Indeed, for Putnam, civic engagement may merely mean the kind of external activity that "gets people off the living room couch."

This formulation suggests that civic engagement is not itself a form of social capital. It requires that neither relationships nor intent to act be in evidence. For example, neither reading the paper nor voting presumes that social capital has been created. Indeed, Putnam's work suggested that social capital grows out of "networks" of this civic engagement—that engagement with others offers a forum for relationship building that facilitates access to social assets.

Civic engagement, then, is a precursor to social capital. We can think of it as analogous to static electricity—inert energy that has not yet been directed into current. Social capital, on the other hand, is created when this civic engagement is "excited" by some catalytic issue or event and directed toward a particular end or purpose.

Two assumptions are implicit here. The first is that, with regard to the well being of communities, civic engagement is additive across individuals and has positive cumulative impacts. This simply suggests that the

¹We should be clear here that social capital is an asset that can also manifest itself in negative ways. Organized crime, street gangs, and the Ku Klux Klan are examples.

welfare of communities increases with increases in the numbers of civically engaged members. The second assumption is that a community's social capital should also be expected to increase with increases in civic engagement. That is, the more inert energy a community has, the easier it may be to harness and deploy. Simply put, social capital presumes and depends on individual civic engagement as a vehicle for building relationships, and, as it relates to individual and community welfare, the more the better.

Community Building as the New Foundation for Community Change

The community-building paradigm that has emerged in recent decades assumes an ability to harness the relationships and social capital, which result from this civic engagement, into a coherent collective and deploy them through a focused strategy. However, these community-building dynamics do not occur on their own. They must be deliberately pursued. Indeed, the actual practice of community building focuses on enhancing the abilities of communities to function in these ways. Yet, because of the social, economic, political, and structural differences between and among communities, the question of how to build these capacities through deliberate intervention and investment has so far eluded any general formulation. We will offer one later.

The community-building framework presented here offers a model for how communities can increase and sustain the engagement of residents in a community change process. In doing so, it attempts to address two major questions: How do the concerns of individual residents rise to become foci for community-wide concern and action? And, when they do, how can community resources be marshaled in a sustainable effort to

address them? The simple answer is that the concerns of individual community members must somehow find their way into a "community conversation," so they can resonate with other community members in a way that can gain their support and provoke them to action. Second, to effect change, community members and their allies must come together to act in a collective effort. Starting and maintaining these conversations and organizing the community for action are major community-building challenges.

The Beginnings of a Framework

Our framework suggests that how this comes about is a very complex process. Indeed, as originally constructed, this framework may be too complex to have practical value to people in the field. To make it more comprehensible, we present the detailed framework in Figure 1, superimposing circles to represent five distinct clusters of activity that make up its major components.

As an overview, Figure 1 suggests a "closed system" wherein civic engagement is a function of the incentives, human capital, participation costs, and hierarchical needs that condition individual "appetites" and preferences for the kinds of "external involvements" that we believe Putnam intends by the term *civic engagement*.

The framework further suggests that this civic-external engagement can be converted (appropriated or intentionally organized) into social capital as a deliberate response to some catalyst. Civically engaged individuals may decide to come together in response to some issue, event, or need. Their success at coming together creates the social capital that is then directed toward some community action or activity in an effort to achieve an outcome. Finally, the outcome, in turn, feeds back into the considerations that condition individual appetites for further civic engagement.

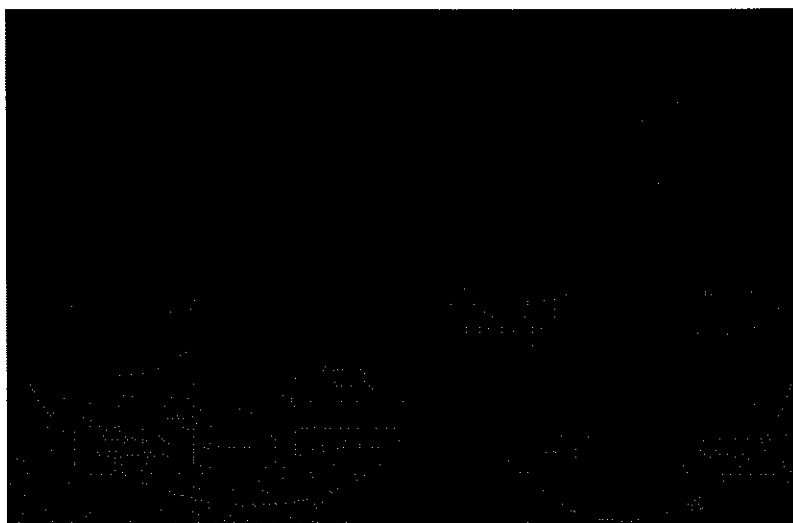


Figure 1. Community building process framework.

As such, the framework is an iterative process. The cycle shown in Figure 1 can be repeated again and again while focusing on a different community issue each time. A neighborhood's concern for police conduct, gang activities, traffic patterns, or educational reform might each be a separate focus of this community-building process. In the real world, however, it is likely that several neighborhood issues might be pursued simultaneously and that this process may be occurring independently or in tandem in different parts of the same communities.

We also assume that this framework has cumulative effects on communities—that is, the strength of the community-building effort should increase with every successful iteration. Every positive story arising about residents' experiences and about successful actions should make it easier to organize and sustain community interest in subsequent community actions and activities. Examining Figure 1 cluster by cluster provides a more detailed understanding.

Cluster I: Resident Engagement

Rationale: Community residents have to become more engaged with each other in ways that will facilitate relationships and the exchange of information.

Cluster I is about resident engagement. It attempts to understand what determines whether individuals become externally active in their communities. Figure 1 hypothesizes that individual preferences for civic engagement are influenced by a combination of the incentives, human capital, participation costs, and hierarchical needs facing residents as follows:

Incentives. There are at least two aspects of the incentives issue to consider—one is the expected benefit from engagement. For instance, much of what we choose to do reflects some calculation of an expected return—some net direct benefit that warrants our investment of time and effort. Alternatively, there may be intrinsic interests where we may do something because it is the right thing to do; or because the value we see is in the doing of it and not in a consequent return.

Human capital. Preferences for resident engagement can also be influenced by one's personal makeup, particularly by issues of self-esteem, confidence, and perceptions that one has something of value to contribute.

Participation costs. Two components of participation costs are worth noting. One relates to costs or "burden." Access to transportation, working hours, and childcare, as examples, can raise significant barriers to participation. The other component is the "opportunity cost" of alternative uses of leisure time. This component is difficult to parse because of difficulties inherent

in assessing valuations of leisure activities. For example, one person may find the opportunity to watch a soap opera on TV just as compelling as another's opportunity to attend a public hearing.

Hierarchical needs. Finally, there is the issue of the priority that people attach to civic involvement in the face of other needs. Residents who are more secure socially and financially may be better positioned to participate in community affairs than lower income residents who may be more preoccupied with issues of daily survival and family maintenance.

Our framework hypothesizes then that these four considerations are among the determinants of individual preferences for civic engagement. There are likely other factors such as upbringing and parental histories and influences that contribute as well to these preferences.

So, one of the first goals of community building should be to invest in strategies that will encourage more social interaction, engagement, and exchange in the neighborhood. Increases in engagement should create more opportunities for residents to form and strengthen relationships. Friendships, kinships, or acquaintances based on other functional relationships might each be enhanced by more frequent interaction.

Cluster II: Agenda Building

Rationale: Residents must find or create forums for sharing and prioritizing their concerns and their aspirations for the community. Cluster II

focuses on the process by which matters important to individuals in the neighborhood become matters of concern for an entire community. Community sentiment is not an easy commodity to arouse. In fact, in our framework, we assume that, given a choice, most individuals, because of economies of time and effort, would prefer to resolve issues by themselves. Working in groups can be stressful because of its uncertainties, inefficiencies, and demands for compromise. Consequently, we presume that an individual's first response and preferred course of action, given any catalytic event or issue, is to "go it alone" and just "take care of it." In developing our framework, it is important to speculate about the conditions under which individuals would choose the less-preferred option of involving others in addressing their concerns.

We believe this choice requires that two sets of threshold conditions be met. The first threshold is reached when an individual feels he or she is unlikely to be successful acting alone. This will occur if the person believes

- That he or she lacks access—that the jurisdiction, or level of authority to which an appeal must be made, lies beyond his or her reach.

- That he or she lacks clout—that the gravity or complexity of the issue in question is too large to be effected by his or her actions or appeals alone.

If this threshold is reached, the individual may choose to abandon the cause altogether.² Alternatively, he or she may decide to join with others in an effort to effect the desired change. But for this joining option to take place, a second set of conditions must also hold, in particular,

- The catalytic event in question must be deemed significant by some critical mass of other community residents who also see it as beyond their abilities to resolve on their own.³
- Some person(s) or entity(ies) must come forward to assume the leadership that will provide a fulcrum for organizing and for channeling community energies and action.

Reaching this second threshold will put an individual's issues on the community agenda. So, a second major goal of community builders should be to foster ongoing opportunities for broad community conversations that will permit the airing and prioritizing of resident concerns into a community agenda for change.

Cluster III: Community Organizing

Rationale: Residents must organize around trusted and capable leadership, taking stock of their social capital and other assets. Leadership is the first component of our organizing Cluster precisely because community expression needs a center around which to revolve. Someone or something must "stand point" as a receptacle for community sentiments, a fulcrum for community energies, and an interpreter and transmitter of community will. An immediate concern for the success of community building, then, is whether there is an ample supply of competent and approachable leadership around which the community can organize.

James S. Coleman suggested that communities can organize themselves and their resources in one of two ways: through intentional organizing or through "appropriable social organization" (Coleman, 1988). *Appropriable* social organization refers to organizing efforts that rely on the neighborhood's ability to adapt or redirect relationships that may already exist. As

such, it raises questions about whether relationships that are grounded in one set of issues or circumstances can be directed to other ends and purposes. So, for instance, a community leader who wants the city to support a summer youth employment program might attempt to enlist or "appropriate" the support of family and friends or the school PTA in that campaign.

Communities with a wealth of neighborhood groups, volunteer organizations, or community-based organizations are presumed to have a strong latent capacity for this form of organizing. By contrast, many of the communities of concern to community builders may not. In these lesser-endowed communities, the energy for community-driven change must be intentionally organized. These intentional efforts force us to consider what it takes to strengthen the level of organization in places where relationships are weak or do not exist. It is a deliberate effort to bolster relationships and build capacity for effective action. The distinction between these two forms of organizing then relates to the presence and to the strength of organizations and relationships in the community. In practice, we might expect most community-driven change efforts to involve some combination of both organizing types.

Cluster III highlights the resources that are available to a community once it is organized. These resources reflect the social capital contained in residents' relationships as well as other community and organizational assets that can be marshaled and deployed on the community's behalf.

Cluster IV: Community Action

Residents must pool their assets into an action strategy and build bridges to other resources that will be needed for success. Community building is about enhancing local capacities to act on the issues and concerns that affect community welfare. In this light, one can think of all of the framework's other clusters as processes that support Cluster IV. Indeed, our framework suggests that resident engagement, agenda building, and organizing are indispensable components of community-empowered change. But ultimately, a community's success in improving the welfare of its resident families and children will depend on what it actually does and how well it does it. In Cluster IV we focus on issues of resources, planning, and the execution of strategies.

Resources. Community building action strategies require attention to both the people and the institutional resources that may be needed. There are two aspects to the people-resources question. One is the focus we highlighted earlier on engaging and organizing some critical mass of people to give momentum to a shared community change agenda. Another, however, is enlisting particular persons both within and outside

²For simplicity's sake we do not show this option in Figure 1.

³At a microlevel of application, say an individual's need for intervention with a landlord, this second set of conditions may reduce themselves to convincing another third-party individual (to employ his or her resources) to intercede on one's behalf. At a more macro level, however, we are referring here to a need for community organizing. Either way the goal will be to amass an effective set of relationship resources to deploy.

the community for whom, by virtue of their positions, talent or expertise may be critical to success.

Much of a community's agenda will likely focus on securing a needed service, activity, or facility of function. Institutional resources, particularly those of community-based organizations (CBOs), will be important because these institutions will act as vehicles for delivering these fought-for benefits. As such, the framework's focus on harnessing the social capital resources of residents should not preclude capacity-building efforts among local nonprofits and entities. Community builders may want to support local nonprofits in their financial, organizational, and systems development efforts. They might also seek to create more opportunities for residents to collaborate with CBOs as a means of establishing legitimacy and trust.

Planning and execution. Perhaps most central question in any local change effort is, "What can and will a community actually do?" Community actions can range from a one-time showing of sentiments and solidarity to more sustained efforts at lobbying, authoring legislative proposals, or launching political campaigns, or both, and more. The important point is that the action that is ultimately taken be driven by a strategy and guided by some kind of plan—preferably a plan characterized by clearly stated goals, a preferred set of outcomes, criteria for what constitutes success, and some mechanism for accountability.

The effective execution of a community strategy boils down to accountability and competence. Do people do what they are supposed to do, and do they do it well? If so, we can assume that we have maximized our potential for impact, given the resources and strategies that were deployed. But good execution will not, by itself, ensure success. Misaligned or ineffectual resources deployed through an ill-conceived plan will likely not produce positive results no matter how well the action is executed. So, investors in community-building efforts may wish to provide resources for planning and technical assistance to enhance the likelihood that action strategies will have desired impacts.

Cluster V: Communication and Message Development

Community builders will need to keep an open line of communications with residents and their community partners about all aspects of the change effort, but particularly as it relates to developing and communicating positive messages about progress and results. Communications are an integral part of any community-building effort. How an initiative describes itself, how it positions the issues, how it recruits participants, how it publicizes events, and how it disseminates results are all important to encouraging

and maintaining resident energy and engagement. Skillful communication strategies can also help energize and engage funders, policymakers, and other important audiences whose cooperation may be needed for community efforts to succeed.

Indeed, communications is important at every stage of community building. At a very basic level, sharing information about what is going on is a fundamental responsibility of the leadership. But communication about methods, operations, and progress can also contribute to long-term learning and the accumulation of "best practices."

In Cluster V, however, the focus is specifically on communicating about outcomes. This narrower discussion is particularly important because of the pivotal connections between those outcomes, how they are received by residents, and the initiative's ability to maintain itself as a community-driven change effort. The focus here is on the potential for using communications strategies to nurture and sustain community-building momentum.

Indeed, sustainability is perhaps the most difficult challenge facing community-building initiatives—how to keep resident interest going so that they continue their engagement with the affairs of the neighborhood. Intuitively, we suspect that residents will continue being engaged as long as they can see some benefit both for themselves and for their neighborhoods. Being clear about these direct and neighborhood benefits, and communicating progress toward their attainment, is of critical importance to maintaining engagement. Our tendency, however, is often to neglect one in favor of the other.

Most of what we regard as outcomes from community-led movements consists of an issue-oriented scoreboard of wins and losses. From this perspective, the bottom is whether—and how well—an action worked. Substantive results are critically important to resident-driven initiatives, and rightly so. After all, the principal driver of this new paradigm is the promise that community building will bring greater success in dealing with persistent social problems than did earlier approaches. Developing and communicating messages about the success of an event can help maintain residents' commitment and keep the momentum going.

But equally important to sustainability may be the extent to which community building provides real and valued rewards to the individual residents who participate. For example, it can be argued that a primary goal of community building should be enhancing the *human* capital of residents—increasing their skills, abilities, and confidence in dealing with the issues that affect their families and neighborhoods. Leadership training, for example, can be transformative in these regards. So, in addition to communicating "wins" on community issues, community-building initiatives should seek opportunities to tell stories about benefits to individual res-

idents and to their personal development through participation.

The intent is to use communications strategies to sustain the community-building effort—to influence how residents assess their appetites for community engagement and encourage them to get involved. Achieving a broad recognition that members of the community have benefited personally and been successful in securing benefits for the neighborhood is the best marketing strategy for the initiative's continuation.

As such, our framework is indeed recursive—beginning with a concern for individual behaviors and the need to encourage individual residents to become engaged with their communities, and ending with strategies to affect those behaviors and offer further encouragement.

Conclusions

As an emerging expression of citizenship and American democracy, community building is becoming an increasingly popular approach to addressing social welfare in the United States. Intuition tells us that comprehensive, locally focused interventions, informed and guided by the people they are intended to serve, may indeed hold more promise than earlier ap-

proaches. But to prove itself as a replicable intervention strategy, community building needs to become more disciplined. It needs to clarify the principles and processes that constitute its practice. And it needs to document them as practiced in communities to evolve as a field of work and study.

This article is offered as fodder for that goal.

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