



# A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

## Boulder County Results of the National Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey

Executive Summary - September, 2001

### OVERVIEW

The National Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, conducted between July and November 2000, was the largest scientific investigation of civic engagement ever conducted in America. Nearly 30,000 people in 41 communities across the U.S. were polled on a wide range of topics related to social connections and community involvement. Grants from the Goldsmith-Greenfield Foundation and the Shoemaker Family Fund of the Community Foundation Serving Boulder County made it possible for 500 Boulder County residents to participate.

This report summarizes some of the initial findings of Boulder County's responses to the national survey. A complete report is available through the Boulder County Civic Forum web site: [www.bococivicforum.org](http://www.bococivicforum.org). An overview of the national study is available at [www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey](http://www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey).

Several key findings are discussed in this Executive Summary:

- Compared to communities with similar demographics, Boulder County ranks very high on several measures of social connectedness and civic engagement, including "Diversity of Friendships," "Protest Politics," "Civic Leadership," "Inter-Racial Trust," "Associational Involvement."
- Boulder County scores relatively low on two measures: "Giving and Volunteering," and "Faith-Based Engagement."
- People living in the eastern part of Boulder County are closer to national norms on several measures as compared to those living in Boulder and mountain communities. They are also happier, and more frequently describe their neighbors as "likely to cooperate" on behalf of their community.
- As in the national sample, people of color in Boulder County tend to have significantly lower levels of social capital than whites. This is especially true of our Hispanic population.
- While people in lower income brackets in Boulder County had higher levels of social capital than their counterparts nationally, upper-income people (those making more than \$75,000) actually had lower scores.
- Older people in Boulder County are much more connected and engaged than their peers in the national sample.
- Giving and volunteering in Boulder County is associated with larger household size (i.e., having children), higher levels of education, and higher "quality of life" scores (self reported levels of health, happiness and satisfaction with one's community). It is also correlated positively to working more hours, but negatively to longer commute times.
- Higher levels of charitable giving, when separated from volunteering, are also predicted by greater wealth, age, and residency in the eastern part of Boulder County.

### BACKGROUND

#### What Is "Social Capital" and Why is it Important?

The National Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey was based primarily upon the work of Dr. Robert Putnam, a sociologist and Director of the Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America at the JFK School of Government at Harvard University. In his book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Putnam refers to social capital as "ways in which our lives are made more productive by social ties." It consists of "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them."

Social capital can take many forms, ranging from membership in clubs and associations, to informal interactions with family members, friends, and neighbors, to formal participation in the electoral process. Putnam has documented that social capital is strongly correlated to positive outcomes for individuals, neighborhoods, and communities, including:

- better schools and greater educational success;
- better performance on measures of child welfare;
- safer and more productive neighborhoods;
- healthier and happier individuals; and
- more responsive government and stronger civil society.

Using measures such as voter turnout, membership in civic organizations, religious participation, informal social connections, and voluntarism and philanthropy, Putnam also shows how social capital has declined precipitously in America since the mid-1960's. He postulates several possible reasons for this, including:

- increased television viewing;
- changes in expectations for civic participation among younger generations;
- increased working hours among adults in households; and
- urban sprawl, which has diminished our identification with "communities of place."

#### The National Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey

The national survey sought to provide a point-in-time snapshot of levels of social capital throughout the country. Local community foundations underwrote the cost of administering the survey in each of 40 locales, which included areas as diverse as a portion of the City of Boston, the Silicon Valley region of California, and the entire state of New Hampshire. In addition, a separate national sample of 3,000 was polled.

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The survey itself consisted of 26-minute telephone interviews that probed ten different types - or "indices" - of social capital with a wide variety of questions as shown below in Table #1.

Social Capital Index	Related Survey Questions (Samples)
1. Social Trust	Trust of neighbors, coworkers, clerks, police, fellow parishioners, "most people."
2. Inter-Racial Trust	Trust of racial/ethnic groups other than one's own.
3. Conventional Politics	Voter registration status; voting history; interest in and knowledge of politics and national affairs; reading daily newspapers.
4. Protest Politics	Membership in group(s) that took local action for reform; attendance at political meetings or rallies; signing petitions; participation in ethnic, nationality, or civil rights organization(s).
5. Civic Leadership	Number of formal group involvements (other than religious); service as an officer or committee member; number of meetings attended; attendance at public meetings re: school or town affairs.
6. Associational Involvement	Membership in: professional associations; hobby clubs; youth or senior organizations; neighborhood associations; service organization; school-related groups; sports leagues; nationality or civil rights organizations.
7. Informal Socializing	Frequency of socializing with friends at home or in a public place; socializing with co-workers outside of work; played cards or board games with others; visited with relatives.
8. Diversity of Friendships	Has friend(s) who: owns a business; is a manual worker; has been on welfare; is a community leader; is African-American, Asian, Latino, and/or white; is gay or lesbian; has a different religious orientation.
9. Giving and Volunteering	Contributions to religious or non-religious charities or causes; volunteering for religious, charity, youth-school, neighborhood-civic, health, or culture-arts organizations.
10. Faith-Based Engagement	Religious attendance/membership; participation in activities besides religious services; \$ contributed to church or religious causes; participation in organization affiliated with religion.

In addition, other data was collected that enabled researchers to correlate levels of social capital to characteristics such as gender, age, length of residency, commute time, race/ethnicity, education levels, and other factors.

## FINDINGS

### Summary: "Community Quotients" of Social Capital

Each participating community was given raw local and national results of the survey, which comprised a huge amount of data. In addition, the Saguaro Seminar developed a method for summarizing the findings that enabled communities to compare their results to other communities with similar demographic characteristics, called a Community Quotient (CQ).

The CQ takes into account that social capital in the U.S. tends

to be more abundant in certain segments of the population, specifically those who are more educated, higher-income, white, and older. The CQ measures the difference between a given community's predicted score on each social capital index—based on these demographic traits—and its actual score. A score above 100 indicates that a community shows more of this community connectedness than its demographics would predict; conversely, a score below 100 indicates that a community shows less. Roughly 68% of all communities fall in the 85-115 range, and almost 95% are in the 70-130 range.

Table #2 summarizes Boulder County's CQ score for each index of social capital and its rank relative to that of the other 39 participating communities:

	Score	Rank
1. Social Trust	108	11
2. Inter-Racial Trust	115	6
3. Conventional Politics	98	20
4. Protest Politics	121	3
5. Civic Leadership	112	6
6. Associational Involvement	113	9
7. Informal Socializing	104	15
8. Diversity of Friendships	128	2
9. Giving and Volunteering	90	30
10. Faith-Based Engagement	76	37
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>6</b>

The chart shows that there were five areas in which Boulder County scored in the top 25% of the communities that undertook the survey:

- Diversity of Friendships
- Protest Politics
- Civic Leadership
- Inter-Racial Trust
- Associational Involvement

These findings indicate that, in general, people in Boulder County tend to be significantly more active, engaged, tolerant and trusting compared to their counterparts in other communities with similar demographics.

In two areas, however, Boulder County was in the bottom 25%:

- Giving and Volunteering
- Faith-Based Engagement

These findings are consistent with studies recently conducted by the Denver Foundation and by the Community Foundation Serving Boulder County that show that levels of charitable giving in Boulder County are below those of other communities in the region and throughout the country. They also bear out the common understanding that charitable giving and involvement in religion are closely linked: religious organizations are the most common vehicle for, and recipient of, American philanthropy. A more detailed analysis of patterns of giving and volunteerism revealed in the survey results is included below in this report.

## Differences Between Eastern and Western Boulder County

The Civic Forum engaged the services of Tony Phipps, a doctoral student at the University of Colorado, to provide an in-depth analysis of the Boulder County survey. One area he investigated was differences in levels and types of social capital between communities within Boulder County. For purposes of this analysis the County was divided into two areas: eastern Boulder County (including Longmont, Louisville, Lafayette, Niwot, Erie, Superior), and Boulder and mountain communities (including a number of CU students).

While their overall social capital scores were comparable, there were some statistically significant differences between the east and western portions of the County on six of the indices.

**Table #3: Comparison of Social Capital Summary Scores for East vs. West Boulder County**

Social Capital Index	Boulder & West	East Boulder Cty.
Social Trust	Same	Same
Inter-Racial Trust**	Significantly Lower	Significantly Higher
Conventional Politics	Same	Same
Protest Politics	Significantly Higher	Significantly Lower
Civic Leadership**	Significantly Higher	Significantly Lower
Associational Involvement*	Somewhat Higher	Somewhat Lower
Informal Socializing	Same	Same
Diversity of Friendships*	Somewhat Higher	Somewhat Lower
Giving and Volunteering	Same	Same
Faith-Based Social Capital**	Significantly Lower	Significantly Higher
<b>Social Capital Summary Score</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>

\*\* Differences significant at 0.01 level of confidence  
\* Differences significant at 0.05 level of confidence

Table #4, below, shows how people in eastern and western Boulder County answered specific survey questions and reveals some interesting differences as well as similarities. For example, East County residents are significantly more likely to report being “very happy” and to say that their neighbors would be likely to cooperate with each other than their counterparts in Boulder and the mountains. Both groups are equally likely to rate their communities as “excellent” places to live.

**Table #4: Comparison of East vs. West Boulder County on Specific Survey Questions**

Survey Question	Boulder & West	East Boulder County
“How happy is respondent” (% “very happy”)*	39.9	47.3
Likelihood of people cooperating (% “very likely”)**	62.7	49.6
Rating of community as a place to live (% “excellent”)	51.2	51.1

\*\* Differences significant at 0.01 level of confidence  
\* Differences significant at 0.05 level of confidence

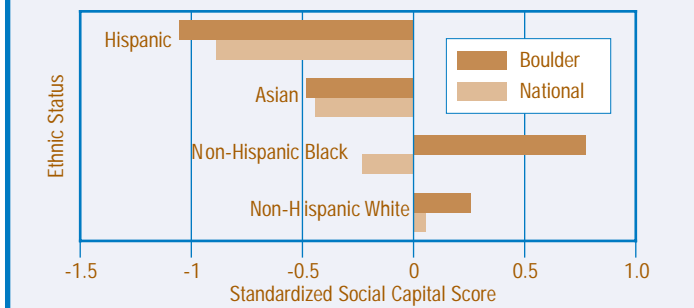
## Correlations Between Social Capital and Race/Ethnicity, Income, and Age

The Civic Forum also wanted to know how levels of social capital in Boulder County vary according to certain demographic characteristics, and how these local patterns compare to national trends.

In the charts below, the central axis or zero-point represents the average of all respondents in the entire 3,000-respondent national sample of the survey. Each bar represents the social capital summary score for each subgroup, and compares it to the overall national average. The length of the bar indicates how close a group’s score is to the national average; bars that extend into the negative range to the left of the zero axis are below the national average and those that extend into the positive range to the right are above it. The numbers along the horizontal axis represent standard deviations and/or portions thereof.

### RACE/ETHNICITY:

**Chart #1: Social Capital Summary Scores by Race/Ethnicity**

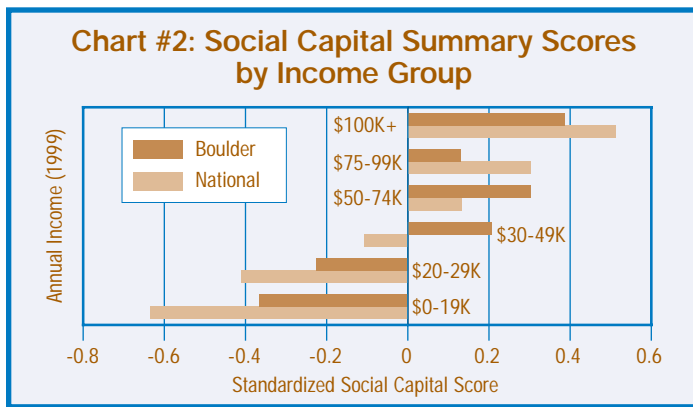


As Chart #1 shows, the relationship between social capital and race/ethnicity in Boulder County generally mirrors that of the rest of the nation: ethnic minority groups tend to be less civically engaged and socially connected than whites. In Boulder County, this effect is actually somewhat exaggerated for Hispanics and Asians, whose scores are even lower than their peers nationally. Whites, on the other hand, have higher levels than their national counterparts. In fact, Latinos in Boulder County had significantly lower levels of social capital than any other ethnic group on nearly every index measured. This effect was even more pronounced for those who responded to the survey in Spanish. Both English and Spanish-speaking Hispanics in Boulder County had lower social capital scores than those in Denver, another surveyed community.

The dramatic exception to the national pattern is among African Americans in Boulder County, whose summary score is higher than any other group including whites, and is higher than the national average rather than lower, as is the case for Blacks nationally. The caveat here is that this effect is exaggerated in the chart because of the small number of Blacks who were surveyed in Boulder County (4), although this is nevertheless proportionate to their population here (around 1%).

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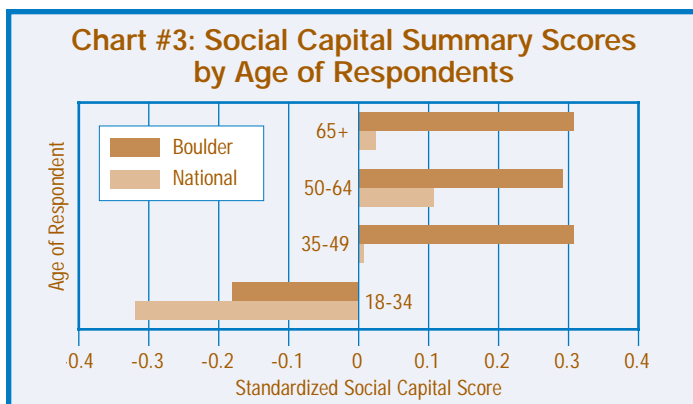
## INCOME:



Nationally, there is a nearly perfect correlation between annual income and social capital – levels of social connectedness and civic engagement rise predictably as personal wealth increases. Again, this pattern is generally mirrored in the Boulder County findings (see Chart #2), but with some interesting twists. First, every income group between \$0 and \$74,000 has a higher level of social capital than its counterpart nationally. Also, in Boulder County the “pivot point” where the social capital summary score goes from below the national average to above it occurs in a lower income bracket (\$30-49,000 instead of \$50-74,000). In other words, lower income people in Boulder County are more involved in and connected to their communities than those who live elsewhere.

At upper income levels, however, Boulder County residents follow a very different pattern than the national norm. Those in the \$75-99,000 range actually show lower levels of social capital than those making \$30-74,000, and while those in the \$100,000+ range still have the highest score of any income group, their score is still below that of their national counterparts. Curiously, those in the upper income categories in Boulder County are less engaged than one would expect.

## AGE:



Nationally, social capital follows an “S-curve” when measured by age group, as shown in Chart #3. That is, younger people tend to be less connected and involved in their communities than older adults. Levels of social capital then rise with age through age 64, but decline again as people ostensibly become less active and engaged. In Boulder County, however, levels of social capital remain consistently high throughout the adult population, even after age 65 (and are higher for all age groups than for their national peers).

## Patterns of Philanthropy

### GIVING AND VOLUNTEERING:

Using a technique called “multivariate analysis,” Mr. Phipps also analyzed which demographic characteristics would best predict a person’s score on each of the social capital indices. As one example of how that work was done, and to highlight an area of particular interest to local community groups, results of the analysis for the “Giving and Philanthropy” social capital scale are summarized below.

As noted previously Boulder County’s Community Quotient scores on the “Giving and Volunteering” social capital scale were low, placing us 30th out of the 40 communities surveyed (remember that this score is derived by comparing our expected score—based on demographic traits such as income and education—to our actual score). Again, it is not uncommon for philanthropic activity to be closely linked to religious involvement, which is reflected in the local survey data as well: Boulder County ranked 37th on the “Faith-Based Engagement” scale. In addition, the local survey revealed that people who give to religious charities are often not the same people who give to non-religious ones.

Multivariate analysis revealed that the following variables are the strongest predictors (though not necessarily causes) of giving and volunteering in Boulder County, in order of their level of significance: 1) higher levels of education; 2) larger households (i.e., having children); 3) higher “quality of life” scores; 4) working more hours per week.

At the same time, “longer commuting time/distance” stood out as being significantly *negatively* correlated with giving and volunteering. In other words, people who work longer hours give and volunteer more, but those who spend more time commuting do so less. This may confirm Putnam’s thesis that the phenomenon of urban sprawl is at least partly to blame for the erosion of social capital in our communities, possibly through some combination of having less time to get involved and feeling less connected to the community or neighborhood in which one lives. Giving and volunteering in Boulder County is also associated with having more education, having children, and being happier, healthier, and more satisfied with one’s community as a place to live.

### CHARITABLE GIVING:

The Civic Forum also looked at predictors of monetary contributions to charitable organizations separately from voluntarism. It was found that the following variables are most significantly associated with higher levels of giving (not necessarily *whether* an individual gives), in order: 1) total household income; 2) household size; 3) level of education; 4) residency in the eastern portion of the County; 5) higher quality of life scores; 6) age; 7) average number of weekly hours worked.

The four variables identified above as predictors of the aggregated “giving and volunteering” measure show up here as well. In addition, three new characteristics emerge. Two or them, total household income and age, are fairly predictable. The fact that residency in eastern Boulder County is a factor may be a result of its higher levels of faith-based engagement.