

# State of the County Report: Civic Engagement and Social Capital

COMMUNITY COMPASS REPORT NO. 16-1

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*Hamilton County, Ohio*



November 2004



**The Planning Partnership** is a collaborative initiative of the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission. The Partnership – open to all political jurisdictions in the county and to affiliate members in the public, private, and civic sectors – is an advisory board that works to harness the collective energy and vision of its members to effectively plan for the future of our County. Rather than engaging in the Planning Commission’s short-range functions such as zoning reviews, the Planning Partnership takes a long-range, comprehensive approach to planning, working to build a community that works for families, for businesses and for the region. The Partnership firmly believes that collaboration is the key to a positive, competitive, and successful future for Hamilton County.

Visit [planningpartnership.org](http://planningpartnership.org) and [communitycompass.org](http://communitycompass.org) for more information.

**Community COMPASS** (Hamilton County’s Comprehensive Master Plan and Strategies) is a long-range plan that seeks to address mutual goals related to physical, economic, and social issues among the 49 communities within Hamilton County. Through a collective shared vision for the future based on the wishes and dreams of thousands of citizens, Hamilton County now has direction to chart its course into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In developing a broad vision with broad support, Community COMPASS will help ensure that trends are anticipated, challenges are addressed, priorities are focused, and our collective future is planned and achieved strategically over the next 20 to 30 years. Through an in-depth analysis of all aspects of the County, the multi-year process will result in a comprehensive plan.

**The State of the County** report series outlines conditions, trends, opportunities, and key measures related to improving and sustaining quality of life in twelve major systems in our community. The individual reports lay the groundwork for an overall State of the County analysis or report card, and provide support for refining action strategies.

## Abstract

### Title:

State of the County Report: Civic Engagement and Social Capital Community COMPASS Report No. 16-1

### Subject:

Current state of civic engagement and social capital within Hamilton County as compared with general findings across the nation along with some of the conditions necessary for growth in social capital.

### Date:

November 2004

### Synopsis:

This report presents existing conditions and trends in Hamilton County related to civic engagement and social capital. The report identifies three important findings as well as the importance of trends associated with each finding, and provides key indicators for measuring progress toward the Vision for Hamilton County’s Future.

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## Context

### COMMUNITY COMPASS COMPONENTS

1	<b>Vision</b> (What do we want?)
2	<b>Initiatives</b> (What strategies should we consider?)
3	<b>Indicators</b> (What should we measure?)
4	<b>Trends</b> (Where have we been?)
5	<b>Projections</b> (Where are we headed?)
6	<b>Research</b> (What's the story behind the trend?)
7	<b>Partners</b> (Who can help?)
8	<b>Strategic Plans</b> (What can we do that works?)
9	<b>Action Plans</b> (How do we make it happen?)
10	<b>Performance Measures</b> (Are actions making a difference?)

This Report

### STATE OF THE COUNTY REPORTS

- Civic Engagement and Social Capital
- Community Services
- Culture and Recreation
- Economy and Labor Market
- Education
- Environment
- Environmental and Social Justice
- Governance
- Health and Human Services
- Housing
- Land Use and Development Framework
- Mobility

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**STATE OF THE COUNTY REPORT:  
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL**

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## Executive Summary

### FINDING 1

#### Hamilton County's population largely mirrors national trends in civic engagement and social capital.

- Civic engagement (involvement in the community) and social capital (connections with people) are important components that facilitate bonding and a sense of belonging in a community.
- One of the most common ways for Americans to participate civically is through voting. Hamilton County residents have voted at a rate higher than the national average.
- The eight-county Cincinnati region ranked in about the middle of levels of civic engagement and social capital in a 2000 national survey study of 40 geographic areas in the U.S. When evaluated further from the perspectives of urban vs. rural, gender, race, age, education, and income, social capital varies quite distinctly.

### FINDING 2

#### National and local societal changes are negatively affecting levels of social capital and civic engagement.

- Many people of middle and high incomes have been leaving the central city for the suburbs in search of homeownership, better schools, bigger lawns, more space, etc. As families spend more of their leisure time on passive activities such as television, video games, and surfing the Internet, less time is available for neighborhood and community interaction.
- Social isolation impacts a community's mental and physical health, often resulting in depression and anxiety and even addiction and hypertension in extreme situations.

- Women have historically been civically engaged because of time spent in the home. Our 21<sup>st</sup> century economy has seen vast numbers of women in the workforce as new educational and professional opportunities have developed. The downside is decreased time for civic engagement.
- Crime is seen as a symptom of social and economic isolation. As social capital declines, there is often an increase in violent crime.

### FINDING 3

#### Local institutions are employing a host of methods to strengthen social capital.

- Local governments in Hamilton County are using a variety of outreach methods such as newsletters, televised meetings, etc. to inform residents about decision-making and events.
- Some private and public school districts now require community service work as a prerequisite for high school graduation.
- As more civic engagement activities occur – from voting to volunteering to running for office – they strengthen democracy by giving a sense of empowerment to citizens.



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# STATE OF THE COUNTY REPORT: Civic Engagement and Social Capital

## *THE VISION FOR HAMILTON COUNTY'S FUTURE:*

*A strong sense of community (within a county-wide framework) with increased public involvement and influence in local and county decision making, that encourages participation by all people in community building, where inclusiveness is embraced and volunteerism is encouraged.*

## INTRODUCTION

This report describes the current state of civic engagement and social capital within Hamilton County as compared with general trends across the nation and explains some of the conditions necessary for growth in social capital.

American communities have experienced significant social and spatial transformations during the last few decades. Neighborhoods have changed in terms of demographic composition, physical size, and overall aesthetics. In addition, many neighborhoods are developing new visions for community life as many newly constructed communities emphasize “private” space for the individual instead of “public” space for the community.<sup>1</sup>

Some researchers assert that this change in emphasis to individual privacy has increased isolation and passivity at the expense of community bonding. Many researchers have concluded that decreased levels of civic engagement (involvement in the community) and social capital (connections with people) are decreasing quality of life.

Although the terms “civic engagement” and “social capital” are often used interchangeably, they maintain unique definitions. *Civic engagement* refers to a person’s involvement in his or her own community. It encompasses many different types of civic involvement, such as voting, community building, and volunteering.

*Social capital* is broadly defined as the “network of social ties or associations an individual acquires, and the level of trustworthiness and reciprocity that exists across those connections.”<sup>2</sup> In this sense, civic engagement is just one type of activity that helps build social capital. For example, the act of voting reinforces the tie between the individual and the association of government.

Rather than being a natural resource to be distributed, social capital is created by individuals at the grassroots level. As social capital is a latticework of “connections” among people and organizations, it is invisible and quite difficult to measure. Theoretically, one could measure social capital by counting the number of connections between people and by studying the character of those connections.

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The Vision Statement for Civic Engagement and Social Capital, a component of *The Vision for Hamilton County's Future*, is based on recommendations from 12 Community Forums in the Fall of 2001 and the Countywide Town Meeting held January 12, 2002.

*The Vision for Hamilton County's Future* was reviewed and approved by:

- Community COMPASS Steering Team, July 30, 2002
  - Hamilton County Planning Partnership, Dec. 3, 2002
  - Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission, Feb. 6, 2003
  - Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners, Nov. 26, 2003
-

Much progress has been accomplished, however, in examining the conditions necessary for social capital growth or decline. Social capital is built by “bonding” or “bridging.” Bonding describes the degree of interactions a member has with other members of his or her group. Bridging deals with a group’s interactions with other groups (or individual group members “building bridges” with members of other groups). The greater the degree of bonding within groups, the greater the sense of an individual’s and a group’s self-worth and purpose. The greater the degree of bridging, the greater the ability of individuals and groups to diffuse and acquire new information. It follows that increasing either or both of these facets increases social capital in turn.<sup>3</sup>

Civic engagement shares a positive relationship with social capital: an increase in one corresponds with an increase in the other. This is because civic engagement (in the form of voting, “get-out-the-vote” drives, public protest, and the like) helps foster human interaction, thereby building social capital.<sup>4</sup> Along-

side civic engagement, work in philanthropic, religious, public advocacy, and professional groups also provides people the opportunity to create social ties and enhance social networks that already exist.<sup>5</sup>

The existence and extent of the social network are important in the creation of social capital, but the internal character of the social network is of equal significance. Mildred Warner, a professor of urban planning at Cornell University, found that the structure of an organization contributes to the amount of social capital generated. Organizations with flatter hierarchies were found to be more egalitarian and tended to encourage more connections among people. Organizations that are more vertically-structured tended to be more authoritarian and discouraged the formation of large networks.<sup>6</sup> This is important because the Civic Engagement and Social Capital vision statement’s call for “increased public involvement and influence” in decision-making with “participation by all,” appears to reflect the desire for flatter hierarchies.

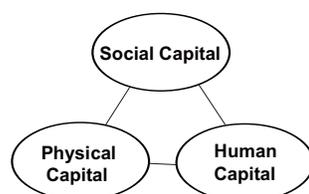
Social capital also increases when other types of capital are present. As noted by political scientist Robert Putnam, physical capital (cash, real estate, investments, etc.), human capital (knowledge), and social capital (human and

organizational contacts) are all interconnected. Strengthening one often entails strengthening of the others (Figure 1). Putnam goes further, suggesting that government and non-profit organizations should invest in both human and social capital, rather than focusing attention on one and hoping for consequent increases in the other. He asserts that “investment in jobs and education, for example, will be more effective if they are coupled with reinvigoration of community associations.”<sup>7</sup>

So then, the multi-dimensional character of social capital allows persons or groups to increase it using a variety of avenues. Neighborhood groups, professional organizations, political parties, and even governments can (and often do) create an infrastructure to facilitate acts of bonding and bridging. For example, in formulating Community COMPASS, the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission solicited opinions from persons and groups from a variety of backgrounds. Through this process, participants pledged to work with each other to achieve goals articulated by the plan. Initiatives such as these allow a variety of stakeholders to play a role in fostering social capital growth by pursuing new and fruitful ventures with those with similar agendas or goals.

Figure 1  
**INTERCONNECTED-  
NESS OF VARIOUS  
TYPES OF CAPITAL**

Source: *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam



FINDING 1

## HAMILTON COUNTY’S POPULATION LARGELY MIRRORS NATIONAL TRENDS IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL.

Using the research and theories of Putnam, the Saguaro Seminar research group at Harvard University initiated a project to measure levels of civic engagement and social capital. The purpose of *The Social Capital Community Benchmark Study* was to expand the knowledge of Americans’ “levels of trust and community engagement,” and to develop “strategies and efforts to

increase this engagement.” In the study, the research team compiled numerous survey results to provide measures of social capital. The study was distributed to community foundations in 40 different geographic areas. Locally, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation and the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati conducted the study. The local research team conducted 1,001 in-

terviews with residents in the eight-county region in 2000.<sup>8</sup>

From their work and the work of other foundations around the country, the Saguaro researchers developed 11 categories — each a component to measure levels of social capital.<sup>9</sup> These components, as defined in Figure 2, demonstrate that levels of trust and reciprocity,

Figure 2  
**GREATER CINCINNATI SOCIAL CAPITAL IN COMPARISON TO 39 OTHER STUDY AREAS**

Source: The Greater Cincinnati Foundation, 2000. *Social Capital Community Benchmark Study*.

Component	Definition of Component	Community Quotient (Expected Value = 100)	Cincinnati Region Rank (out of 40 areas)
Social Trust	Generalized trust of other community members	102	15
Inter-Racial Trust	Trust among different ethnic and racial groups	95	21
Conventional Politics	Involvement in political process through means that are within the power structure	81	37
Protest Politics	Involvement in political process through means that oppose the power structure	91	29
Civic Leadership	Involvement in groups or clubs and local discussion of town affairs	107	12
Associational Involvement	Formal participation in various organizations including sports, labor, and arts	112	10
Informal Socializing	Establishing and nurturing informal friendships	104	16
Diversity of Friendships	Identification of friends from different socioeconomic backgrounds	92	29
Giving and Volunteering	Donation of time or money to philanthropic causes	108	11
Faith-Based Engagement	Involvement in religious organizations and institutions	105	13
Social Capital Equality	Degree of spread of social capital across ethnic, racial, and social groups	116	4
<b>Average Score</b>		<b>101</b>	<b>18</b>

diversity of friendships, participation in faith-based organizations, and activity in protest politics all affect the amount of a person's or a community's social capital.

In order to compare different geographical areas, a "community quotient" (CQ) was calculated to gauge the extent to which each component was present in the community. The CQ is a performance score

based on the area's degree of "urbanness," levels of ethnicity, levels of education, and age distribution. These criteria were used because (as will be shown later in this report) there are correlations between these variables and levels of social capital.<sup>10</sup>

A CQ greater than 100 indicated that the community was more "connected" than its demographic profile predicted. A CQ below

100 indicated that a community showed less of that dimension of social capital. Roughly 68 percent of all communities fell in the 85-115 range, and almost 95 percent of all communities fell in the 70-130 range.

Figure 2 shows that in most respects, the Cincinnati Metropolitan Region's level of social capital was fairly predictable given its demographic profile. The area scored highest in the "social capital equality" component, indicating that social capital was relatively evenly spread across all groups. The region also puts a high emphasis on joining associations, an important part of bonding.

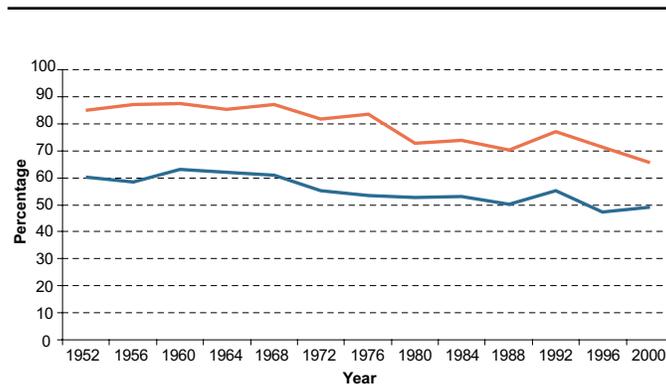
The most common way for Americans to participate civically is through voting. As shown in Figure 3, Hamilton County residents have voted at a rate consistently higher than the national average. Moreover, Hamilton County's voter turnout rate is in line with comparable cities as Figure 4 demonstrates.

However, compared to the 39 other areas surveyed in the national study, Greater Cincinnati did not fare well in the "conventional politics" facet of social capital, ranking 37<sup>th</sup> out of 40. This low ranking was due to a number of factors, including an inability on the part of most surveyed who did not know the names of their two United States

**Figure 3**  
**RATE OF TURNOUT FOR GENERAL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN HAMILTON COUNTY AND THE UNITED STATES, 1952 - 2000**

— Hamilton County  
 — United States

Source: Hamilton County Board of Elections and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

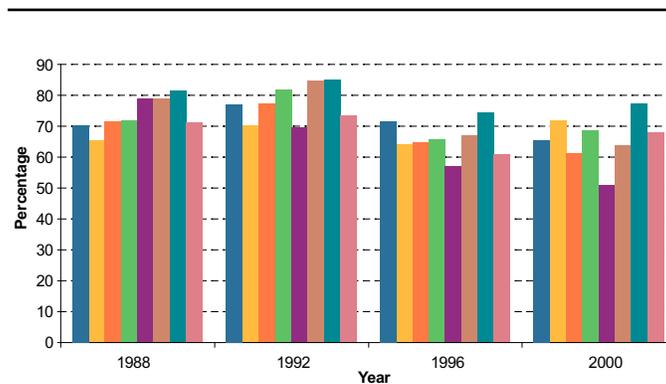


**Figure 4**  
**RATE OF TURNOUT FOR GENERAL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN COMPARABLE COUNTIES, 1988 - 2000**

■ Cincinnati  
 ■ Cleveland  
 ■ Columbus  
 ■ Louisville  
 ■ Indianapolis  
 ■ Pittsburgh  
 ■ St. Louis County  
 ■ St. Louis City

Note: City of St. Louis not included in St. Louis County data.

Sources: Boards of Elections of Allegheny, Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Marion, and St. Louis Counties.



senators, and a decreased propensity of low-income households to vote. Though protest politics were low in the region for the 2000 study, since then the City of Cincinnati has seen increases in public demonstrations and boycott calls in protest of alleged racial bias by the police department and the City's governance structure. Greater Cincinnati also ranked low in the "Diversity of Friendships" and "Inter-Racial Trust" components of social capital.

The variation in social capital component scores helped position the Cin-

cinnati region a little above midway in Saguardo's national study, ranking 18<sup>th</sup> out of 40 when averaging the component scores. Rural South Dakota as a region had the highest average social capital score, followed by Greater Seattle. Houston, Texas had the lowest average score.

The Cincinnati region's ranking near the median of the list (followed closely by the State of Indiana) is a function of the area's demographic profile being closely related to America's racial, socioeconomic, and cultural background. As shown in Figure 5, in the

Cincinnati region some groups of people practice some social capital components more than others do.

For example, "Protest Politics" (in Figure 5) — often undertaken to challenge power structures and those who are seen to perpetuate them — were most often practiced by older citizens, Blacks, and males in Greater Cincinnati. This is understandable in that they were an important group in the 1960s-era struggle for civil rights. However, persons with high incomes and the highly-educated were also more likely to

**Figure 5  
GREATER CINCINNATI  
POPULATION  
CHARACTERISTICS  
EXHIBITING HIGHER  
LEVELS OF SOCIAL  
CAPITAL, 2003**

Note 1: For "Location," "Suburbs" refer to Hamilton County suburbs only. For "Age," "Young" is ages 18-34, "Middle-Aged" is ages 35-64 years, and "Older" persons are those over the age of 65. For "Education Level," "Low" is persons with only a high school diploma, and "High" is someone with graduate or professional school training. For "Income Level," "Low" is a household with earnings less than \$30,000 a year and "High" has earnings more than \$75,000 a year. Note 2: "No Difference" means there was no obvious difference. Note 3: Using results from the local survey, the information in the table was determined by adding the total affirmative responses to questions and separating them based on geography, gender, etc.

Source: The Greater Cincinnati Foundation and the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission.

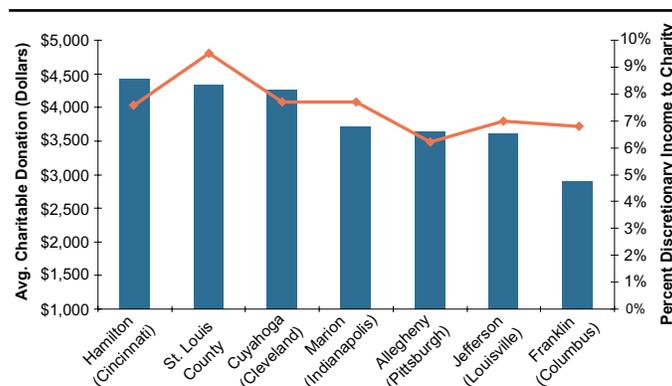
**Figure 6  
LEVELS OF  
CHARITABLE  
DONATIONS BY  
CENTRAL COUNTY**

Legend:  
■ Average Charitable Donation  
—●— Discretionary Income to Charity

Note: City of St. Louis not included in St. Louis County data

Source: The Chronicle of Philanthropy. 2003. *Analysis of Giving in America's Counties*. Data supplied by the Cincinnati office of the Better Business Bureau.

Social Capital Component	Location	Gender	Race	Age	Education Level	Income Level
Social Trust	Suburbs	Female	White	Older	High	High
Inter-Racial Trust	No Difference	Female	White	Older	High	High
Diversity of Friendships	Cincinnati	No Difference	No Difference	Older	High	High
Conventional Politics	Suburbs	Male	White	Older	High	High
Protest Politics	No Difference	Male	Black	Older	High	High
Civic Leadership	Suburbs	No Difference	White	Middle-Aged	High	High
Associational Involvement	No Difference	No Difference	No Difference	No Difference	High	High
Informal Socializing	No Difference	No Difference	White	Young	No Difference	No Difference
Giving and Volunteering	Suburbs	Female	White	Middle-Aged	High	High
Faith-Based Engagement	No Difference	Female	No Difference	Older	High	No Difference



engage in this form of civic participation.

Levels of “Giving and Volunteering” (in Figure 5) were highest among people living in suburban Cincinnati; and highly-educated, higher-income people most often performed this activity. As shown in Figure 6, compared to other central counties in the region, Hamilton County had the highest average level of donations to charity and the fourth-highest percentage of discretionary income donated to charity behind the City of St. Louis, and about even with Cuyahoga and Marion Counties.

### Why Is This Important?

These geographical, gender, racial, age, educational, and class differences in levels of social capital and civic engagement are by no means accidental. Throughout American history it has often been the case that the highly-educated and those in the upper-economic classes are the most civically-engaged. Persons in these groups are the most likely to see the government’s role in changing social and economic conditions as quite clear, and are more likely to see themselves as being able to influence these conditions. For some time now, a correlation has existed between the economic status of

individuals and the degree to which they believe they can affect (and are affected by) government policies — the poor believing that they have considerably less power.

Many commentators argue that social capital varies depending on race and class. In his book *The Ghetto Underclass*, sociologist William Julius Wilson found that “not only do residents of extreme-poverty areas have fewer social ties, but they [also] tend to have ties of lesser social worth, as measured by the social position of their partners, parents, siblings, and best friends.”<sup>11</sup>

Some go even further, asserting not just that social capital varies across race and class groups, but that they share specific relationships. While a positive relationship exists between socio-economic class and social capital, with race the situation is a bit different.

Many think that this disparity in social capital is exacerbated by the segregated character of American cities. The physical separation of Whites from Blacks closely corresponds with a separation of the wealthy from the poor. Poorer Blacks — often inhabiting inner-cities with poor schools, dead-end jobs, and high crime — sometimes find it difficult to engage in “bridging” with persons unlike themselves. With

the precarious economic situation of these poorer citizens, some think that achieving group solidarity through bonding is also a difficult task.<sup>12</sup>

Hamilton County’s racially and economically segregated environment, and the difficulty that brings to the engagement of sustained “bridging” initiatives, will undoubtedly work to constrain our community’s capacity for problem resolution and realization of a common vision. However, such dissimilarity need not preclude the attempt at such initiatives. After all, people establish connections with co-workers, clients, and fellow congregants, not just their neighbors. Though forums for discussion do exist, government officials, community leaders, and ordinary citizens will have to develop new ways of nurturing this essential dialogue.

### Key Indicators:

- *Voter turnout in presidential elections (Figure 3)*
- *Metro rank of per capita giving to United Way*
- *Per capita giving by total population and employment category*
- *Average charitable donation by county (Figure 6)*
- *Level of education (U.S. Census Bureau)*

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FINDING 2

## NATIONAL AND LOCAL SOCIETAL CHANGES ARE NEGATIVELY AFFECTING LEVELS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

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Throughout America's history, social capital has fluctuated as political, economic, technological, and cultural changes have transformed the nation. These changes often affect other aspects of life, including the types of available jobs, family structure, the physical shape of communities, leisure activities, and the perceived value of civic participation.

In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam argues that because of increased mobility and sprawl, Americans have become increasingly isolated from each other. Neighborhoods that once incorporated a variety of land uses and operated at the "small scale" have declined in the face of suburbs with enough land to offer "big-box" retail. People drive cars at sometimes enormous distances to work or play. The relative cohesiveness of the past has morphed into a disjointed present.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, in most major American cities — including Cincinnati — persons of middle and high incomes have been leaving the central city for the suburbs. This withdrawal from the central city and its problems was part of a

larger desire on the part of many Americans not just for homeownership and its accoutrements of lush lawns, more space, and air conditioning, but also to avoid the racial desegregation of public schools. These attitudinal shifts are reflected in many of the federal and state laws that helped create the suburban migration in the 1950s and 1960s. It is even reflected in individual houses that were constructed during the period, as the increasing emphasis on the home and privacy helped diminish the size of the front porch and increase the size of the rear deck and backyard in post-World War II America.<sup>14</sup> One need only contrast the tidy two-chair stoops of Northside with the step-and-screen-door of suburban Cincinnati's late-20<sup>th</sup> century homes.

The changing role of women has also affected social capital. Women have historically been more civically-engaged because so much of their time was not occupied by work outside the home. Today, however, many women have joined the labor force as new educational and professional opportunities have developed. These opportunities were spurred in

part by the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s — a movement that posited women's equality with men's. While this political movement advocated that women choose the roles they desire in society (including choosing to work outside the home), increases in the cost of living during the 1970s and 1980s prompted many women to enter the workforce not out of choice but necessity.

Today, according to Putnam, both women and men feel pressured by the demands of work (even as many researchers claim that the number of hours American workers work has been fairly constant since World War II). Americans regularly complain about not having enough free time, and this reasoning is often used to justify lack of civic engagement.

Residents of the Cincinnati region mirror this national trend. In a September 11, 2003 Cincinnati Enquirer article titled "*Strong at first, volunteer spirit has waned*," Carl Biery of the American Red Cross expressed satisfaction at the surge in community service immediately after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. However, "*when*

[the potential volunteers] found out how much time it would take, they found they [didn't] have that much time." The same article cited data from the United Way of Greater Cincinnati indicating a 28 percent rise in the number of persons interested in volunteering immediately after the terrorist attacks. Throughout 2002, however, the number of persons who wished to volunteer increased only 1.8 percent.<sup>15</sup>

Along with lack of free time and urban sprawl, Putnam also indicts technology and mass media as reasons for social capital's decline. Passive leisure activities such as television, video games, and the Internet have become common items in the American home. In Putnam's analysis, these activities have significantly undermined civic engagement and the potential to increase social capital. In general, leisure has become increasingly individualistic and private, not group- or community-focused.

Generational replacement has also contributed to decreased social capital. The generation of Americans that lived through the Great Depression and World War II often held strong connections with neighbors and communities. In some ways, the maintenance of such connections was a necessity for survival.

After World War II, however, things changed. Backlashes from important events like *Hernández v. Texas*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and the women's movement, coupled with effects of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, contributed to an increased cynicism and desire to disengage from civic activities. Though it is difficult to assess the rates of social capital and civic engagement of future generations, it is clear that their social, technological, and economic experiences will shape that generation's desire to engage with neighbors and community members.<sup>16</sup>

case because some degree of bonding among community members is necessary when the local government must be petitioned for amenities such as new signage, street lamps, or nuisance control.

Secondly, declining social capital is strongly correlated with property and violent crime levels. Generally, crime in a community is a symptom of social and economic isolation — a feeling that society and/or government cares little about that community's welfare. People within those communities sometimes turn to crime out of hopelessness in finding employment, inability to relate to family members or others close to them, or out of desperation. In this sense, crime is both a consequence of, and helps perpetuate poor bonding and bridging, and hence contributes to low levels of social capital.<sup>17</sup>

Thirdly, communities with low levels of social capital struggle to adapt to changing demographic, technological, economic, and social trends in the broader region or country. Social capital theorists like Putnam argue that this is often the case because of poor bridging, which is an important tool in understanding how other groups have adapted to similar changes. The result is a kind of "vicious cycle:" an

### Why Is This Important?

Declining levels of civic engagement and social capital have significant implications for communities. Communities with low levels of social capital tend to have an inability to solve community problems. This is often the

Figure 7  
MOST "STRESSFUL"  
CITIES, 2004

Source: Sperlings Best Places

Rank	Metro Area
1	Tacoma, WA
16	St. Louis, MO - IL
48	Indianapolis, IN
50	Cleveland - Lorain - Elyria, OH
62	Louisville, KY - IN
65	Cincinnati, OH - KY - IN
74	Pittsburgh, PA
82	Columbus, OH
100	Albany - Schenectady - Troy, NY

unwillingness or inability to bridge with like-minded communities that helps engender parochialism. The group sees itself as being so different from or so far removed from other communities that it soon believes it has little to learn from them.

Finally – and closely related to the difficulty of some citizens’ experiences in adapting to new contexts – low levels of social capital often add to stress and reduce community mem-

bers’ overall mental and physical health. Social isolation resulting from the lack of personal relationships is highly correlated with depression and anxiety. These problems can sometimes lead to physical ailments such as addiction and hypertension. Figure 7 is an excerpt from a list of America’s “most stressful” cities, as measured by such factors as divorce rate, alcohol consumption, unemployment rates, and mental health. Out of 100 metropolitan areas, the

Cincinnati metropolitan region ranked 65th, and was also deemed more “stressful” than Pittsburgh and Columbus.

### Key Indicators:

- *Rate of violent and property crime (U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation)*
- *Community stress levels (Sperling's Best Places)*

#### FINDING 3

## LOCAL INSTITUTIONS ARE EMPLOYING A HOST OF METHODS TO STRENGTHEN SOCIAL CAPITAL.

Whereas the goal of Community COMPASS — with regard to the issues of Civic Engagement and Social Capital — is to encourage a strong sense of community, increased public involvement, and increased public participation, the research shows that such activity must come from “the grassroots.”

However, government can play a role in increasing this type of activity by encouraging citizen participation. Since social capital and civic engagement are intimately linked with human capital and physical capital, addressing any one of these issues will

undoubtedly affect another in a positive manner.

A reason citizens often give for not engaging with their local governments is that many of the issues that government and society face seem impossible to solve. Other citizens express that they are not adequately informed about the goings-on in their respective communities.<sup>18</sup>

To address citizens’ feelings of powerlessness and to combat civic apathy, many local governments in Hamilton County mail monthly or quarterly newsletters to residents informing them about community events. In addition to regu-

larly scheduled meetings of councils or boards of trustees, some jurisdictions conduct community forums. Twenty-nine communities in Hamilton County use the Intercommunity Cable Regulatory Commission to broadcast public meetings on cable television. The City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County also use cable television to broadcast important meetings and community events.

Moreover, some private and public school districts now require community service work as a prerequisite for high school graduation. Some examples of Hamilton County high schools

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with this requirement include Mariemont and Madeira High Schools in eastern Hamilton County, and Elder High School (as part of its religion requirement) in the west.

### Why Is This Important?

Short-term and long-term investments in public education are seen by many as a good way of increasing human capital, which in turn helps to increase both social and physical capital. Conversely, public education's investment in social capital (for example, through the increased use of community service programs in schools) also has the potential of increasing the two other forms of capital. Such investments would increase the rates of various forms of civic engagement — from voting, to volunteering, to running for public office — which helps strengthen democracy.

Likewise, local government's attempts to incorporate large segments of the public in decision-making also helps strengthen democracy in that such involvement often gives a sense of empowerment to citizens. An important step in a government's attempt to incorporate more voices is to minimize the “distance” between government and the public. This is currently being done through various

types of media like television and newspapers, but governments can also create more venues to open a sustainable and “two-way” dialogue. Citizens can also form (or work with existing) community groups to lobby their local governments or engage in other civic activities. Participation in such groups not only increases social capital and civic engagement, but strengthens democracy in that it brings more voices and ideas into community discussions.

The initiatives and strategies articulated in Community COMPASS reflect this desire for a stronger, more open, and more inclusive democracy. However, it is not only local governments that have a role to play in realizing this kind of democracy. Local media and civic groups, as well as individual citizens, must each attempt to make connections with those in the public sphere. These connections work to strengthen ties and help make common visions realities.

### Key Indicators:

- *Number of Hamilton County high schools with community service prerequisites (public and private schools)*

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STATE OF THE COUNTY REPORT:  
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

# Appendix A

## Endnotes

1. However, some believe that we are now witnessing the creation of spaces that blend the public and the private. One prominent example of this kind of space is the gated community. Such communities are private in that they are often enclosed by gates or walls, but they are “public” in the sense that anyone within those walls can use the community’s amenities. Some gated communities organize around activities such as golfing or rowing, attracting residents primarily interested in creating a lifestyle centered on those activities.
2. For more on the differences between “Civic Engagement” and “Social Capital,” see The Greater Cincinnati Foundation. *Social Capital in Greater Cincinnati*. The Institute for Policy Research, University of Cincinnati. 2003. [www.greatercincinnati.org/page225.cfm](http://www.greatercincinnati.org/page225.cfm).
3. For additional information about “bonding” and “bridging” see: The Greater Cincinnati Foundation. *Social Capital in Greater Cincinnati*. Op. cit., or Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000. pp. 22-24.
4. Kenworthy, Lane. “Civic Engagement, Social Capital, and Economic Cooperation.” *American Behavioral Scientist*. March 1997. 4.5. pp 645-656.
5. Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone*. Op cit.
6. Warner, Mildred. “Social Capital Construction and the Role of the Local State.” *Rural Sociology*. July 28, 1999. 64.3 pp. 1-14.
7. Putnam, Robert. “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America.” *The American Prospect*. December 1, 1996. 7.24. pp. 1-22.
8. The “eight-county region” includes Butler, Clermont, Hamilton, and Warren Counties in Ohio; Boone, Campbell, and Kenton Counties in Kentucky; and Dearborn County in Indiana.
9. For additional information see: The Greater Cincinnati Foundation. *Social Capital in Greater Cincinnati*. Op cit.
10. For additional information see: The Greater Cincinnati Foundation. *The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*. The Saguaro Seminar: Harvard University. 2001. [www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/).
11. *The Ghetto Underclass: Social Science Perspectives*. Ed.: William J. Wilson. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. 1993.
12. West, Cornell. *Race Matters*. New York: Vintage. 1994; Wilson, William Julius. “The Underclass: Issues, Perspectives, and Public Policy.”
13. Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone*. Op cit.
14. Wilson-Doenges, Georjeanna. “Push and Pull Forces Away from Front Porch Use.” *Environment and Behavior*. March, 2001. 33.2. pp. 264-278.
15. Anglen, Robert. “Strong at First, Volunteer Spirit has Waned.” *Cincinnati Enquirer*. September 11, 2003. A1.
16. For additional information see: Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone*. Op cit.
17. Rosenfeld, Richard, Steven F. Messner, and Eric P. Baumer. 2001. “Social Capital and Homicide.” *Social Forces*. 80.1. pp. 283-309.
18. Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone*, Op cit.



# Appendix B

## Community COMPASS Publications

The following Community COMPASS reports are components of Hamilton County's Comprehensive Master Plan and Strategies. The reports are available at the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission and can be downloaded at [www.communitycompass.org](http://www.communitycompass.org).

1. Project Design -- Scope and Process (Oct. 2001)
2. The Community Values Survey (Jan. 2001)
3. Special Research Reports
  - 3-1. Inventory of Research (2002)
  - 3-2. Conflicting Views on Suburbanization (Sept. 1999)
  - 3-3. Spreading Out: The March to the Suburbs (Oct. 1999; revised 2003)
  - 3-4. Summary Report -- Spreading Out: The March to the Suburbs (Oct. 1999; revised 2003)
  - 3-5. The Use of Public Deliberation Techniques for Building Consensus on Community Plans: Hamilton County Perspectives on Governance (A Guide for Public Deliberation) (Dec. 2002)
  - 3-6. Hamilton County's Comparative and Competitive Advantages: Business and Industry Clusters (Oct. 2003)
  - 3-7. Census 2000 Community Profiles: Political Jurisdictions of Hamilton County
  - 3-8. Community Revitalization Initiative Strategic Plan (Aug. 2003)
4. The Report of the Community Forums --Ideas, Treasures, and Challenges (Nov. 2001)
5. The Report of the Goal Writing Workshop (2001)
6. The Countywide Town Meeting Participant Guide (Jan. 2002)
7. Hamilton County Data Book (Feb. 2002)
8. A Vision for Hamilton County's Future --The Report of the Countywide Town Meeting (Jan. 2002)
9. The CAT's Tale: The Report of the Community COMPASS Action Teams (June 2002)
10. Steering Team Recommendations on The Vision for Hamilton County's Future (Jan. 2002)
11. Planning Partnership Recommendations on The Vision for Hamilton County's Future (Jan. 2003)
12. The Vision for Hamilton County's Future (Brochure) (Feb. 2003)
13. Initiatives and Strategies
  - 13-1. Steering Team Recommendations on Community COMPASS Initiatives and Strategies (2002)
  - 13-2. Steering Team Prioritization of Initiatives -- Methodology and Recommendations (Aug. 2002)
  - 13-3. Planning Partnership Recommendations on Community COMPASS Initiatives and Strategies (revisions, findings and reservations) (Dec. 2002)
  - 13-4. Community COMPASS Initiatives and Strategies -- Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission Recommendations (Jul. 2003)
14. External Influences: The Impact of National Trends on Hamilton County's Future (Mar. 2003)
15. Population
  - 15-1 Summary Report (Nov. 2004)
  - 15-2 Atlas / comprehensive report (2005)
16. State of the County Reports (Key trends, Issues, and Community Indicators) (Nov. 2004)
  - 16-1 Civic Engagement and Social Capital
  - 16-2 Community Services
  - 16-3 Culture and Recreation
  - 16-4 Economy and Labor Market
  - 16-5 Education
  - 16-6 Environment
  - 16-7 Environmental and Social Justice
  - 16-8 Governance
  - 16-9 Health and Human Services
  - 16-10 Housing
  - 16-11 Land Use and Development Framework
  - 16-12 Mobility
  - 16-13 Executive Summary
17. 2030 Plan and Implementation Framework (Nov. 2004)





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