



## Contribution of 4-H Participation to the Development of Social Capital within Communities: Multi-state project NCERA215

### What is Social Capital?

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Social capital is a resource that includes several elements of social well-being including trusting networks among people, engagement with institutions, and connections to resources.

Social Capital contributes to positive youth development in two ways:

#### 1. *Benefits to Individual Youth*

Social capital is the network of relationships that increase an individual's access to privilege and resources (Bourdieu, 1986). Relationships and connections can serve as a bridge or link for youth to enhanced life skills and opportunity.

#### 2. *Benefits to the communities within which youth live*

Social capital can also represent the community-wide advantages of having trusting relationships, including those that result from increased youth civic and community engagement. Social capital can also be described as "the web of cooperative relationships between members of a community that allows them to act collectively to solve problems together" (Chazdon, Allen, Hornvedt & Scheffert, 2013, p. 1).

Three types of social capital are relevant to positive youth development.

1. *Bonding networks* are close ties that help people 'get by' by offering a sense of identity and security (Catts & Ozga, 2005). These connections are usually with family, friends, and neighbors.
2. *Bridging networks* are weaker ties that can help people get ahead and gain opportunities by widening the social network (i.e. community volunteers, mentors and employers).
3. *Linking networks* are links to organizations and systems that can help people gain resources and bring about change (i.e. universities and community organizations) (Calvert, Emery, & Kinsey, 2013).

### How does 4-H build social capital?

One of the most interesting findings from a study of 4-H clubs is that youth who are engaged in community service tend to have higher degrees of Social Capital. That is, youth who are engaged in at least 5 community service projects where they are involved with the conceptualization, design, planning and execution of a community service project are more connected to community networks, resources and institutions. These connections are facilitated through bonding and bridging relationships.

Bonding relationships are reflected in club members' and volunteers' sense of belonging. Bonding social capital ties people who already know each other and/or share a sense of

common identity, closer together based on such things as family, culture, and ethnicity (Enfield, 2013). It is the "sociological superglue" that can keep youth connected.

Bridging relationships allow youth to get ahead. Bridging social capital, also referred to as 'inclusive' social capital, provides links beyond a shared sense of identity, and encompasses people across diverse groups. It can be seen as the sociological WD-40. In contrast to bonding networks, bridging networks are much better at providing linkages to external resources and for information dispersion (Enfield, 2013). 4-H educators and volunteers can contribute to youth bridging social capital by focusing on service projects that connect young people to diverse community networks (Henness, Ball & Moncheski, 2013).

One way 4-H community service can build from bonding to bridging social capital over time was described by Emery & Flora (2006). Starting at the bottom, bonding relationships within a group of youth or youth/adult partnerships provide the basis for entering into relationships that widen their social networks.



### **Why is Social Capital particularly relevant to a public organization like 4-H?**

The 4-H Social Capital team has found that assessing and drawing attention to social capital has helped emphasize the value of new relationships, increased the trust of youth in communities, strengthened young people's sense of community, and created opportunities to strengthen social capital further (Emery & Flora, 2006). Measuring social capital assists practitioners in making a case for the public value of youth work that intentionally creates social capital for participants and the broader community. Stakeholders will appreciate that communities are better off when youth organizations are engaged in building bridges to the community and fostering interpersonal relationships among diverse people.

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