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**SOCIAL CAPITAL STUDY: NEW INSIGHTS INTO COMMUNITY LIFE  
Local Survey Results Released**

York County is one of 40 communities throughout the United States participating in the largest-ever survey of the civic engagement of Americans released today. The research project was designed by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and sponsored locally by York Foundation. Dr. David Polk of York College of Pennsylvania was the Foundation's academic partner. The local survey was funded by Wellspan Health.

The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey polled nearly 30,000 people nationwide. Five hundred randomly sampled York Countians, selected to represent the County's population, participated in the local 25-minute telephone survey. Questions asked about a wide range of types of civic and social involvement. The term social capital encompasses these involvements. It refers to the amount of interpersonal trust, networking, group membership and community involvement that exists in a community.

**Initial analysis of survey findings shows that York County exhibits high levels of informal social capital. The county's levels of social trust, inter-racial trust, and giving and volunteering can serve as an example to other communities. As an example, 61% of York County residents trust their neighbors a lot. Nationwide, the percentage is 49%.**

The survey builds on the work of Harvard Professor Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community*. In his book, Putnam chronicles the erosion of social capital in America over the last generation and the negative consequences of this for the quality of our education, our physical health and happiness, the safety in our streets, the responsiveness of democratic institutions of government and in economic development. He urges Americans to create opportunities for more and better civic engagement.

“We believe this information on York County’s social capital can have enormous utility for our community as we ask ourselves, ‘What can we learn from it? How can a better understanding of our strengths – and our weaknesses – help us build a better community?’” said Carolyn E. Steinhauser, York Foundation executive director.

### **York Compared to Other Communities**

While interviews were occurring in 40 individual communities, the same interview was being conducted with a random sample of 3000 persons across the United States. This allows each community participating in the project to compare its social capital to the amount that exists in the entire United States.

Given the diversity of the United States population, the most meaningful comparison can be made to similar communities. Using statistical modeling, social capital scores were computed for a hypothetical community with the same demographic characteristics as York County. The County’s social capital can then be compared to this “communities like ours” to see how we fare. This comparison is done using Community Quotient (CQ) scores that are similar to an IQ score. A score of 100 indicates that a community has the same level of social capital as would be expected given its demographics. A score above 100 means a community has more, and a score below 100 shows it has less.

### High Levels of Social Trust, Inter-Racial Trust, Giving and Volunteering

As shown in the accompanying chart, York County has higher levels of social capital than “communities like ours) on five of the 10 measures of social capital.

Measure	York County Community Quotient
Social Trust	119
Inter-racial Trust	113
Giving and Volunteering	107
Informal Socializing	105
Faith-based Engagement	103
Civic Leadership	99
Association Involvement	99
Diversity of Friendships	97
Protest Politics	89
Conventional Politics	74

York County residents exhibit significantly high levels of social and inter-racial trust.

Social trust refers to general interpersonal trust, as well as trusting neighbors, co-workers, fellow members of one’s congregation, store employees, and the local police. **Over half of the York County sample (53%) feel most people in general are trustworthy. The comparable percentage at the national level is 47%. In “communities like ours,” the percentage is 48%.**

Inter-racial trust measures how much someone trust members of other races and ethnic groups in comparison to how much they trust members of their group. **The percentage of York Countians trusting other groups “a lot” is greater than found in the national sample or in “communities like ours.”** Since a random sample of York County results in a limited number of racial minorities being included in the sample, the racial trust measure mainly applies to white York Countians. Further research that will be prompted by this study can investigate levels of inter-racial trust among York County’s minority population.

## **Social Capital Affects Perceptions of Quality of Life and Personal Happiness**

Social trust, and to a lesser extent, inter-racial trust, affects how residents perceive the quality of life in York County. Persons with high levels of either social or inter-racial trust are more likely than others to rate their community positively. As an example, **nearly two-thirds of County residents (64.8%) rate York County as an excellent place to live, compared to only 16.4% of those with low social trust.** A noteworthy relationship also exists between social and inter-racial trust and personal happiness. This relationship is not as strong as the one involving the evaluation of the community as a place to live. As an illustration, **half of the residents (50.0%) with high social trust describe themselves as being very happy personally. In contrast, only about a fourth of those with low social trust (27.4%) are very happy.**

## **The Role of the Family and Religion in York County**

Areas of social capital in which the County has levels that are somewhat higher than “communities like ours” are informal socializing and faith-based activities. Close family ties and the relationships we maintain with relatives accounts for our scores on the informal socializing measure. Being church members and being involved in church activities other than worship services influence the County’s performance on faith-based capital.

## **Non-Religious Formal Group Involvement**

When it comes to involvement in organized groups, the County is at a level is similar to “communities like ours.” Most often, York Countians participate in groups helping the social welfare of the community and in hobby- and business-related groups.

### **Less Diverse Friendships**

The population tends to be slightly lower on diversity of friendships. This suggests that **persons we have as personal friends are not quite as diverse as in “communities like ours.”** An examination of the individual questions that make up this measure shows that we are less likely to have an Hispanic, Asian or welfare recipient as a personal friend. Our incidence of these specific types of personal friends is lower than in “communities like ours” and the nation.

The inter-racial trust measure demonstrates, however, that while we may not have members of some groups as personal friends, we still trust those groups.

### **Lower Political Capital**

The County population scores lower on dimensions of social capital that relate to politics. Compared to other communities with the same demographics, **York Countians are less likely to be involved in either conventional politics, such as voting, or protest politics, such as signing a petition or attending a political rally.** Our lower political involvement is illustrated by the fact that over two-thirds of the people interviewed were not able to name either United States senator from Pennsylvania.

### **The Entire Community Shares in Social Capital**

For whatever reasons, many measures of social capital increase as education and household income levels increase. However, in York County this relationship exists to a much lower extent than in other communities. **It appears that all segments of York County possess and use social capital.** Since York County has lower educational levels than the nation, this finding is somewhat surprising. It may indicate that the County has a heritage of community involvement. As the data continues to be analyzed, the reason for this will be explored.

## **Not An Excuse For Complacency**

“While our social capital may look good by comparison, doing better than a norm or average isn’t necessarily doing well – and no excuse to accept levels as they are,” said Mrs. Steinhauser. “Now that we have a benchmark, we have something against which to measure our progress going forward in building our social capital.”

For example, 31% of the County has high racial trust. This is higher than the 27% for the nation and 29% for “communities like ours.” Similarly, 43% of the County compared to 33% of the United States and 36% of “communities like ours” demonstrate high social trust. “Our challenge is to increase these percentages,” Mrs. Steinhauser said.

## **More Data Analysis**

This initial analysis of the data is only the first step in what is expected to be extensive examination of the County and national data. York College of Pennsylvania will convene a public conference later in the year. Being organized by the Behavioral Sciences Department, the conference will present more in-depth discussions of the survey findings. In preparation for the conference, York College faculty and students will be studying the data to more thoroughly understand social capital in York County. The community is encouraged to direct any questions related to social capital they would like to see researched to the Behavioral Sciences Department.

The local data will also be a valuable resource in the context of the YorkCounts report on Community Indicators which will be published this spring. The Indicators were developed with extensive community input over the past two years and focus on measures of the quality of life in the community related to education, economics, family and community and health and safety. Sponsors of the YorkCounts report are Better York, Healthy York County

Coalition, United Way of York County, Wellspan Health, York County Chamber of Commerce and York Foundation.

### *Nuts and Bolts*

*The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey was designed by the Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America, a project of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The principal investigator of the project was Professor Robert D. Putnam.*

*The survey is comprised of a national sample of 3,000 respondents and representative samples in 40 communities nationwide (across 29 states) covering an additional 26,200 respondents. Each sponsoring organization of local surveys (largely community foundations) decided on the size and sampling geography for each community sample. Most of the samples range in size from 500 – 1500 interviews. (see attachment for listing of communities)*

*TNS Intersearch, an international survey firm, conducted the interviews and prepared data for analysis*

*As part of the project community foundations, along with their academic and community partners, participated in learning sessions on the subject, directed by Putnam, his associates and The Aspen Institute.*

*The Survey, the largest scientific investigation of civic engagement ever conducted in America, represents an extraordinary and enormous trove of data for researchers and policy makers. Investigations to-date have only begun to scratch the richness of the survey data.*

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