

ROCHESTER AREA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

SOCIAL CAPITAL SURVEY FINDINGS

In the summer and fall of 2000, with the support of the Rochester Area Community Foundation, 988 residents of the Greater Rochester Region (six counties: including Monroe, Wayne, Ontario, Livingston, Genesee, and Orleans) were interviewed by phone about their level of “social capital.” They joined a national sample of 3,000, plus approximately 26,000 people surveyed in 39 other U.S. communities.

“Social capital” is a term used by Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard University to describe the connections among people and their families, friends, neighbors, coworkers, government, and other people in the community. Measures of social capital include levels of trust, tolerance, and involvement with others.

These are the key local findings for Greater Rochester from this landmark Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey. These findings were selected by Rochester Area Community Foundation because they are important, interesting, and statistically reliable. Where Greater Rochester data are presented without national comparisons, it is because, based on statistical tests, we cannot be certain that the national data are different from the Greater Rochester data.

TRUST

Overall, people in the Greater Rochester Region are more trusting than people in the nation as a whole. We trust people in general more and we trust our neighbors, store employees, and local police more.

- 53% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region said that, generally speaking, people could be trusted while 47% of respondents in the national sample felt that way.
- 54% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region said that they could trust their neighbors a lot; 48% of respondents in the national sample said they could trust their neighbors a lot.
- 32% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region said that they trust the people who work in the stores where they shop a lot; 28% of respondents in the national sample feel the same way.
- 55% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region said they trust the local police a lot while 49% of respondents in the national sample felt the same way.

TOLERANCE

People in the Greater Rochester Region are somewhat more tolerant of people’s differences than people in the nation as a whole. People in the Greater Rochester Region have a more diverse set of friends and are more tolerant of immigrants. Also, a greater proportion of us believe that controversial reading material should be publicly available.

- 80% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region have a personal friend who has a different religion from them while 74% of respondents in the national sample do.
- 64% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region have a personal friend who is Black or African American while 60% of respondents in the national sample do.
- 42% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region have a personal friend who is gay or lesbian while 34% of respondents in the national sample do.
- 41% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region have a personal friend who has been on welfare while 37% of respondents in the national sample do.
- 63% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region disagree or strongly disagree that immigrants are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights; 47% of respondents in the national sample feel that way.
- 77% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region disagree or strongly disagree with keeping books of which most people disapprove out of the public library; 67% of respondents in the national sample feel the same way.

FORMAL INVOLVEMENT

People in the Greater Rochester Region are not very involved in formal group activities. While we are generally not different from the national respondents in this regard, there are a few important areas where our participation is even lower than the nation's. In addition, we participate in religious services and other religious activities less often than people throughout the nation.

- 54% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region scored low or very low in formal group involvement. (A score of low or very low means respondents belonged to two or fewer groups.) This is similar to the national percentage.
- 58% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region did not attend a single club meeting in the past twelve months. This is similar to the national percentage.
- 60% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region didn't attend a single public meeting in the last year where there was a discussion of town or school affairs. This is similar to the national percentage.
- 46% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region did not volunteer at all during the past twelve months, which is comparable to the national rate. On a more positive note, 63% of local respondents made charitable gifts to non-religious organizations, exceeding the national rate of 55%.
- Only 10% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region were involved in a labor union in the last year. This is similar to the national percentage.
- Only 7% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region were involved in a public interest group, political action group, political club, or party committee in the last year. This is similar to the national percentage.

In the following areas – including religious participation -- the Greater Rochester Region was lower than the nation in its involvement:

- Only 17% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region were involved in a parents' association or support group like the PTA in the last year. 22% of respondents in the national sample were.
- Only 15% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region were involved in a neighborhood association, block club, homeowner/tenant association, or crime watch in the past year. 20% of respondents in the national sample were.
- 11% of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region were involved in a club affiliated with religion (such as a Bible Study) in the past year. 16% of the respondents in the national sample were.
- 33% of those respondents in the Greater Rochester Region who report having a religion attend religious services once a week or more, compared with 41% of national respondents with a religion.

The largest proportion of Rochester area respondents were involved in charity/social welfare organizations or in clubs related to a hobby such as gardening or investing. Almost a third (30%) of respondents in the Greater Rochester Region had been involved in a charity or social welfare organization that provides services in such fields as health or service to the needy in the past twelve months. Slightly more than a quarter (27%) of respondents were involved in clubs related to a personal hobby. This level of involvement is similar to national levels.

DISPARITIES

There are deep disparities in social capital among different groups of people in the Greater Rochester Region. We see important differences among people of different races, ages, educational levels, and incomes.¹

While these disparities across groups are important, they are not unique to Rochester. They are common in the national data as well.

It is important to recognize that these disparities may be caused by many factors. For example, some of the responses of people with high incomes may be caused by the generally high educational levels of high-income people, not simply by the fact that they have high incomes. We have begun to examine the *independent* effects of particular demographics or group characteristics and urge other researchers to do the same.

These findings are for the Greater Rochester Region only.

By Race/Ethnicity:

Black respondents are far less trusting, have more racially and ethnically diverse friends, more friends on welfare, and fewer friends with vacation homes, and have greater faith-based involvement than Non-Hispanic White respondents. They have similar levels of involvement in political activities and similar involvement in

¹ For this summary, we adopted the group classifications that were provided by the national polling firm.

formal groups as Non-Hispanic Whites except in church groups (where their involvement is higher).

Hispanic respondents are less trusting than Non-Hispanic White respondents and have similar trust levels to Black respondents. They have more racially and ethnically diverse friends and more friends on welfare than White respondents and have generally similar levels of involvement in political activities and formal groups as both White and Black respondents.

All respondents had similar levels of informal social activity except that Non-Hispanic Whites visited with relatives more often than either Blacks or Hispanics.

- 57% of Non-Hispanic White respondents, 34% of Black respondents, and 30% of Hispanic respondents said that, generally speaking, most people can be trusted.²
- 59% of Non-Hispanic White respondents, 20% of Black respondents, and 26% of Hispanic respondents said that they trust the people in their neighborhood a lot.
- 45% of Non-Hispanic White respondents, 28% of Black respondents, and 31% of Hispanic respondents trust the people they work with a lot.
- 61% of Non-Hispanic White respondents, 55% of Black respondents, and 41% of Hispanic respondents trust the people at their church or place of worship a lot.
- 35% of Non-Hispanic White respondents, 15% of Black respondents and 20% of Hispanic respondents trust the people where they shop a lot.
- 62% of Non-Hispanic White respondents, 19% of Black respondents and 34% of Hispanic respondents trust the local police a lot.
- Of the respondents who reported having a religion, 31% of Non-Hispanic Whites, 53% of Blacks, and 34% of Hispanics attended religious services at least once a week.³
- Of the respondents who expressed a religion, 39% of Non-Hispanic Whites, 56% of Blacks, and 39% of Hispanics took part in some sort of activity at their place of worship other than attending services.

By Age:

Trust is higher among respondents age 50 and older. Formal group involvement varies by age and type of group, with young people more involved in sports clubs or Internet groups, and senior citizens more involved in veterans or seniors groups. Respondents' involvement in conventional politics generally increases up to age 50. Respondents age 65 and older have less diverse friends than younger respondents while 18-34 year-old respondents have much higher informal interactions than older respondents.

² For this question and the questions about trust of neighbors, co-workers, and store employees, the differences between Blacks and Hispanics are not statistically significant. In other words, we cannot be sure that the percentages for these two groups are different.

³ For this question, the difference between Non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics is not statistically significant. In other words, we cannot be sure that the percentages for these two groups are different.

- 27% of respondents age 18-34,
38% of respondents age 35-49,
54% of respondents age 50-64, and
53% of respondents age 65 and older ranked high in the social trust index (which is a compilation of 3 or more social trust questions from the survey and classifies respondents as low, medium, or high in their trust levels).
- 34% of respondents age 18-34,
53% of respondents age 35-49,
72% of respondents age 50-64, and
71% of respondents age 65 and older said they trust their neighbors a lot.
- 43% of respondents age 18-34,
66% of respondents age 35-49,
86% of respondents age 50-64, and
94% of respondents age 65 and older voted in the 1996 presidential election.⁴
- 37% of respondents age 18-34 had friends over to their home more than 40 times in the past twelve months while only 9% of respondents age 65 or older had friends over to their home more than 40 times in the past twelve months.

By Educational Level:

Respondents with a college degree or greater are much more trusting, much more involved in group activities, have a more diverse set of friends, and are more involved in conventional and protest politics than respondents with less formal education.

Respondents with some college but not a bachelor's degree are more trusting, have more diverse friends, are more involved in formal groups, and somewhat more involved in conventional and protest political activity than respondents with less formal education.

- 41% of respondents with a high school degree or less, 54% of respondents with some college education but not a bachelor's degree, and 70% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or more said that, generally speaking, most people can be trusted.
- 14% of respondents with a high school degree or less, 24% of respondents with some college education but not a bachelor's degree, and 33% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or more were involved in five or more formal groups.

⁴ For this questions, the difference between responses from people age 50-64 and people age 65 and older is not statistically significant. In other words, we cannot be certain the percentages are different for these two groups.

- 7% of respondents with a high school degree or less, 12% of respondents with some college education but not a bachelor's degree, and 20% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or more attended a political meeting or rally in the past twelve months.

By Income Level:

Trust and formal group involvement tend to increase as income increases. Respondents with incomes below \$30,000 are somewhat less involved in conventional politics and civic affairs than respondents with higher incomes. There is no difference in informal social activities among income groups.

- 38% of respondents with incomes below \$30,000, 56% of respondents with incomes between \$30,000 and \$75,000, and 62% of respondents with incomes over \$75,000 said that they feel they can trust their neighbors a lot.
- 58% of respondents with incomes below \$30,000, 68% of respondents with incomes between \$30,000 and \$75,000, and 75% of respondents with incomes over \$75,000 voted in the 1996 presidential election.
- 14% of respondents with incomes below \$30,000, 24% of respondents with incomes between \$30,000 and \$75,000, and 26% of respondents with incomes over \$75,000 are involved in five or more groups.

By Geography:

Respondents living in the City of Rochester are the least trusting group of citizens, followed by respondents living in the five counties surrounding Monroe County (Wayne, Ontario, Livingston, Genesee, Orleans), followed by respondents living in the Monroe County suburbs of Rochester. Respondents living in different areas have different kinds of friends. With a few key exceptions, there is generally no difference in formal group involvement among respondents living in the different parts of the six-county region. Respondents in the counties surrounding Monroe County visited family more often than respondents from other places.

- 39% of respondents in the City of Rochester, 26% of respondents living in the five counties surrounding Monroe County, and 12% of respondents in the Rochester suburbs had low social trust.
- Respondents who live in the suburbs are less likely than respondents from the City or from the counties surrounding Monroe County to have a friend who has been on welfare and more likely than respondents from the City to have a friend who owns a vacation home. Respondents who live in the City are more likely to have friends who are Black or African American than respondents from either the suburbs or the counties surrounding Monroe County.
- 28% of respondents in the counties surrounding Monroe County were involved in a youth organization in the past twelve months, while 20% of respondents in the City of Rochester were and 18% of suburban Monroe County respondents were.⁵

⁵ For this question, the difference between the City of Rochester and Monroe County (without Rochester) is not statistically significant. In other words, we cannot be certain that the percentages are different.

- 30% of respondents in the counties surrounding Monroe County visited relatives more than once per week in the past year, while 22% of City respondents and 19% of suburban respondents did.⁶

Many of these disparities among people who live in different places disappear when we eliminate the effects of income, education, age, race, and other characteristics. This indicates that where a person lives does not, *per se*, affect his or her social capital. Instead, it shows that people with similar characteristics tend to live in the same place.

BARRIERS TO INVOLVEMENT

About half of us in the Greater Rochester Region (47%) say there are significant barriers to becoming involved in our community. Work schedules, lack of information, and safety concerns top the list of barriers that are cited. Many respondents also feel that they can't make a difference.

- 71% of respondents experiencing barriers to involvement say that inflexible or demanding work schedules and/or inadequate child care is a very important or somewhat important obstacle to getting involved in their community.
- 61% of respondents experiencing barriers to involvement say that lack of information or not knowing how to begin is a very important or somewhat important obstacle to getting involved in their community.
- 49% of respondents experiencing barriers to involvement say that concern about their safety is a very important or somewhat important obstacle preventing them from getting involved.
- 47% of respondents experiencing barriers to involvement say that feeling that they can't make a difference is a very important or somewhat important obstacle preventing them from getting involved.
- 41% of respondents experiencing barriers to involvement say that feeling unwelcome is a very important or somewhat important obstacle preventing them from getting involved.
- 34% of respondents experiencing barriers to involvement say that inadequate transportation is a very important or somewhat important obstacle preventing them from getting involved.

###

⁶ For this question, the difference between the City of Rochester and Monroe County (without Rochester) is not statistically significant. In other words, we cannot be certain that the percentages are different