



# **Cook County Assessing Social Capital: Results and Insights for Action**



**Extension Center for Community Vitality  
University of Minnesota**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
**EXTENSION**

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# Background and Overview on Social Capital

## What is social capital?

"It's not *what* you know, it's *who* you know." This common saying describes some of what is known about *social capital*. The saying implies what we commonly observe—that getting membership to exclusive clubs requires inside contacts; that close competitions for jobs and contracts are often won by those with friends in high places.

But “who you know” makes a difference in other ways, too. When you fall on hard times, it is friends and family who create a safety net. Your happiest and most rewarding hours may be spent talking with neighbors, sharing meals with friends, being at religious gatherings, or volunteering for community projects. (Woolcock & Narayan 2000) That’s what social capital is all about.

## Three Main Conditions of Social Capital

- ▶ **Trust:** People rely on the character, ability, strength or truth of someone or something.
- ▶ **Engagement:** People take part...doing something for another without any immediate expectation of return (reciprocity).
- ▶ **Connections/Networks:** There is a collection of people you know who you can count on.

The ability to create and use networks is important for personal success -- on-the job, in professional organizations, in volunteer work. Communities also can create and use networks to improve the quality of life in their town. Networks help us get information, ideas, influence, and resources so that we can accomplish goals.

When you and your community improve your social capital, you can make change happen. You can leverage your strong networks for better results, and you can address your weak networks to make a difference in the future.

## What are the benefits of social capital?

The basic idea of social capital is that your family, friends, associates – even acquaintances – are an important asset. You can tap that asset to survive a crisis, improve your financial footing, or just enjoy life more. This is true for individuals and for groups. Communities that have a rich and diverse stock of social networks and civic associations are less vulnerable, and can more easily tackle problems.

When social capital is lacking, it shows. We all know what it is like to fear being left out of the loop on important decisions, or to not be able to get a job in a field or organization where we don't know anybody. One reason that people stay in poverty is that they don't have the social networks and institutions that could be used to get a good job or decent housing (Woolcock & Narayan).

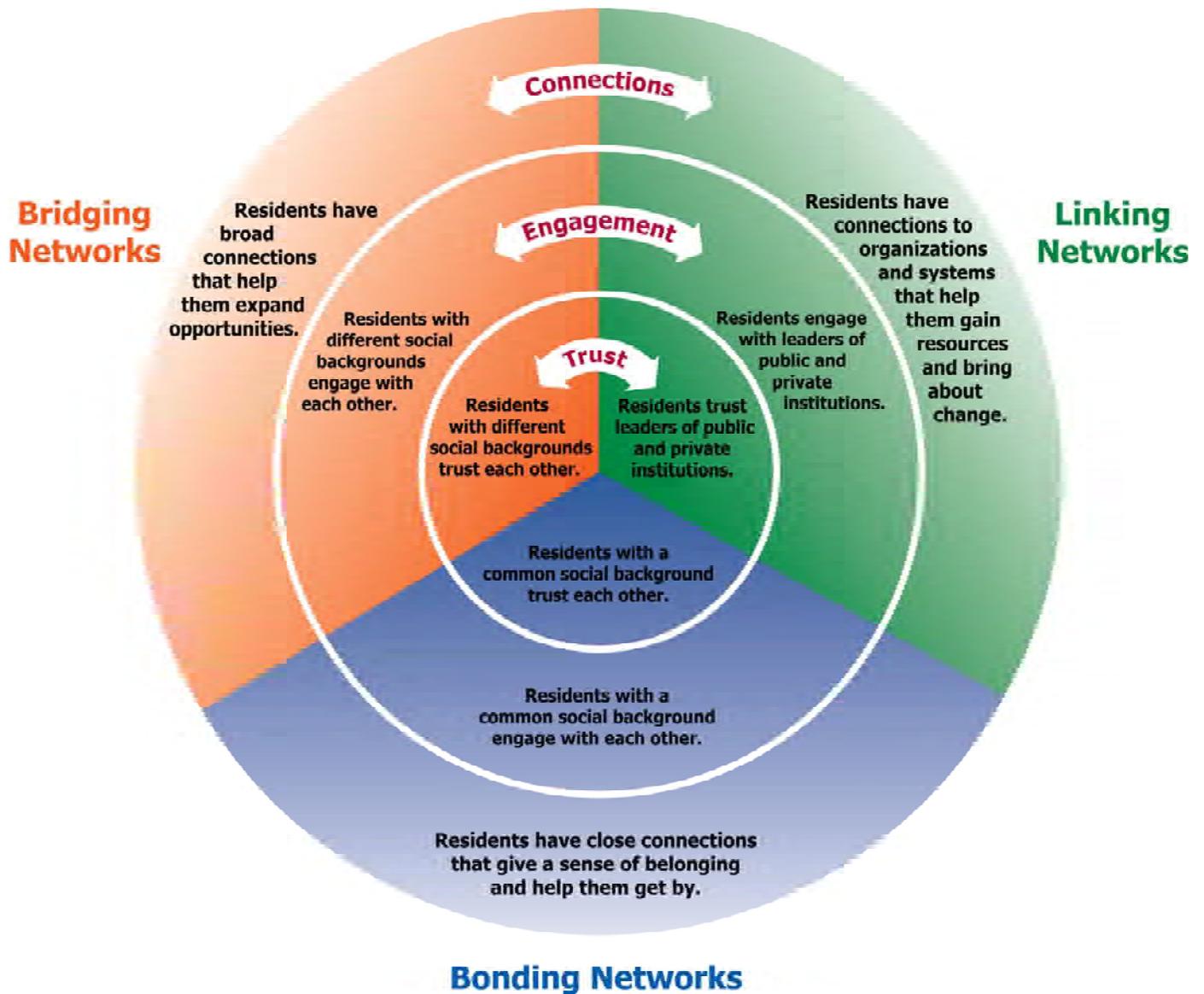
Social capital is so valuable that it affects almost every aspect of personal and community life. One report from Harvard University (Saguaro Seminar) summarized the benefits – stronger communities, better education, economic prosperity for peoples and communities, individual well-being and public health.

## How can communities strengthen social capital?

Broad, diverse participation in social networks has side benefits. When people are in social and economic relationships that they can trust they are better able to resolve personal or community problems. Engaged people are more likely to hear about a job or get good information about health issues. Connections between people in community life links them to resources so that personal and public problems can be solved more easily.

Communities can improve their social capital by strengthening their residents' trust and engagement within three distinct types of networks: bonding, bridging and linking.

Figure 1. Community Social Capital Model



## Community Social Capital Model

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# The Assessment Process

## A bit of history

The University of Minnesota Extension's work on social capital started in August 2002 with a search for a community survey that would help rural communities look at the social aspects of their community life. When no model for rural communities could be found, University of Minnesota Extension decided to develop one.

The first pilot of the survey was started in January 2004. Since then, the assessment process has been used with ten rural communities (four towns, two school districts and four counties). Between 2002 and 2008, we gathered data from over 3,200 individuals. We have responses from 2,659 adults and 555 youth who completed a youth version of the survey. An online version of the survey has also been piloted.

The research (validity and reliability testing) included three pilot versions of the survey tool which resulted in an instrument that is a solid measure of social capital. The full survey has a total of twelve questions that focus on six measures: bonding trust, bonding engagement, bridging trust, bridging engagement, linking trust and linking engagement.

## Focus on networks and our six measures

The assessment focuses on trust and engagement within the three types (bonding, bridging, linking) of networks.

**Bonding networks** are close ties that help people get by. These connections are usually with family, friends, and neighbors.

**Bridging networks** are weaker ties that can help people get ahead and gain opportunities. Examples are usually with people different from themselves; who are engaged in different types of networks like occupations, organizations, etc.

**Linking networks** are links to organizations and systems that can help people gain resources and bring about change. These connections are usually with organizations that have resources, both within and outside of the community.

*Some key assumptions:*

- All three types of networks matter because they benefit individuals and communities differently
- Size and strengths of networks can vary

The survey measures three types of networks and two key variables resulting in these six measures: bonding trust, bonding engagement, bridging trust, bridging engagement, linking trust, and linking engagement

## The community process

As its title suggests, the community assessment process requires communities to provide leadership for training volunteers and gathering input. It is designed to identify areas where the community already has a strong foundation (strengths to build on) as well as areas to strengthen (priorities for action). To this end, the efforts of those involved in Cook County were an important part of moving this process forward.

Diane Booth provided leadership and coordination for the Cook County assessment process. Volunteers gave of their time and talents to implement the survey across the county. Because this was a county-wide assessment, there was a core team involved throughout the process. Other community volunteers had different levels of involvement to identify sectors and communities within Cook County.

These volunteers attended planning sessions, training sessions and canvassed the county administering the survey to community members. In the “community planning phase” of the project several meetings were held to: 1) determine the boundaries of the community to be assessed, 2) develop a plan to reach a cross-section of the community to complete the survey, 3) select survey methods, 4) identify additional volunteers needed to assist with data collection, and 5) develop promotional strategies.

Those meetings were:

- Informational and planning meeting held November 29, 2007. Five individuals attended.
- Training session held December 18, 2007. Eleven individuals attended.
- Four decisions were made about implementing the survey.
  1. The survey would be administered county-wide.
  2. The youth audience would be included in the assessment process. The youth survey would be used within classrooms at two different grade levels (9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>).
  3. They would use “group settings,” “individual contact,” “local organizations,” and “common locations” to gather survey information.
  4. Radio, newspaper, and on-line advertising would be used to promote the survey.

The plan for the data collection mapped out strategies for reaching a representative sample (educational, economic, age, etc.) of the community based on county demographics and included specific locations and access points. An online version of the survey was made available to all residents and involved a special marketing effort to reach seasonal residents of Cook County not present during the survey.

Volunteers selected areas in the community where they would be responsible for distribution and collection of surveys. To gather data from youth, Diane Booth worked with school faculty to coordinate the survey which she administrated to ninth and eleventh grade students.

The planning team found challenges to gathering the data. Most notable were these challenges:

**Retirement and seasonal location.** Cook County has many seasonal residents and/or residents that have multiple residences. Many residents of Cook County travel to warmer climates during the winter months. Cook County also has many short-term residents who take advantage of seasonal employment.

**Surveying in January.** Winter is not an ideal time in northeastern Minnesota to undertake a community-based project with portions of our population not in residence.

**Outreach to Grand Portage.** The location of the Grand Portage Indian reservation in the upper most tip of the state was part of the challenge. There was a lack of available volunteers from Grand Portage to administer the survey, so it required one-on-one survey contacts from someone outside that community.

**County as a Community.** Covering the entire county was strenuous given the amount of geography to cover, the time limit of less than one month, and a mindset change to think of the county as a “community” rather than the narrower view of different communities within the county.

The assessment process resulted in data being gathered from 427 adults and 74 youth which surpassed the goals for outreach identified by the community planning team.

## The demographics

The Cook County survey sample was more educated and wealthier than the population as a whole. Over half of the adults who completed the survey had bachelor’s degrees or higher levels of education; census data shows that about 30% of the adults in the county have that level of education. In addition, very few seasonal residents were part of the sample because the survey was conducted in the winter. To a small degree, the web-based survey was successful in reaching them – 12% of those who completed the electronic survey identified themselves as seasonal residents, compared with 3% of those who completed the paper survey.

Overall, however, 93% of those who completed the survey responded that they were year round residents of Cook County. This compares with census data showing that closer to half of the adult residents live there year round. The large percentage of year-round respondents may have to do with the way we asked the question. It may be that people who spend winters in warmer places still responded that they were year-round residents because they consider the time in the south as “vacation” rather than seasonal residence.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the adult sample**

Demographic Characteristic	Cook County Population	Sample
% female	49%	65%
% minority	9%	2%
% age 60 or older	30%	33%
% who earn > \$75,000 (household)	14%	30%
% homeowners	78%	91%
% with bachelor's degree or higher	29%	57%
% year round residents	48%	93%

The survey asked participants to identify which community they considered to be “their community.” The results of this question are presented in Table 2. Some community residents selected more than one response, but the overall finding was that the overrepresented Grand Marais residents and underrepresented Grand Portage residents.

**Table 2. Community identifications of survey respondents**

Community	Percentage of population in the county (based on year-round residents)	Percent of participants (respondents could choose more than one community)
Grand Marais	26%	54.6%
Lutsen	7%	16.4%
Hovland	n/a	9.4%
Gunflint Trail	n/a	7.7%
Grand Portage	11%	5.6%
Schroeder	4%	6.5%
Tofte	4%	5.3%

## Survey Findings

### About the scores

It is important to keep in mind a few notes about the scores from the data analysis.

- ▶ Responses to questions concerning each of the types of networks were quantified, combined, and averaged.
- ▶ The scores are intended as starting points for talking about social capital in the community.
- ▶ They are not scientifically based, the whole story, or “proof”.
- ▶ Scores are from 0 to 100
  - 0** = everybody in the community had the lowest possible responses
  - 100** = everybody in community had the highest possible responses
  - 50** = a good benchmark to use. The further above or below 50 the score is, the more it is an indicator of areas of strength or challenge for the community

The more representative the sample, the more confident we can be about the results. In the case of Cook County, we know the sample was more educated and wealthier than the population as a whole, so the actual strength of the dimensions of social capital for the whole community may be somewhat lower than what is indicated in the data that follows.

### Comparison to other communities

In this report we compare Cook County with other communities that have completed the Social Capital survey. For comparison purposes, it can be helpful to know the demographics of those communities. Those are provided in Table 3. Among the four communities, Cook County had the lowest education levels and was one of the higher end with regard to the percentage of minorities and those aged 60 years and older.

**Table 3. Demographics of comparison communities**

	Cook County <sup>1</sup>	Southern Community \$ <sup>12</sup>	Western Community <sup>1</sup>	Southern Community #2 <sup>1</sup>
Scope of community	County	School district	Zip code area	Zip code area
Population size	5,168	19,526	4,331	8,771
Percent minority	9%	7%	10%	2%
Percent of adults with high school education or less	40%	54%	50%	50%
Percent of households with \$75,000 or higher income	14%	15%	11%	22%
Percent of population age 60 or older	23%	18%	25%	16%

<sup>1</sup> SOURCE: American Fact Finder, index of data provided by the US Census Bureau, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>  
<sup>2</sup> SOURCE: School District Census Data, <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sdds/>

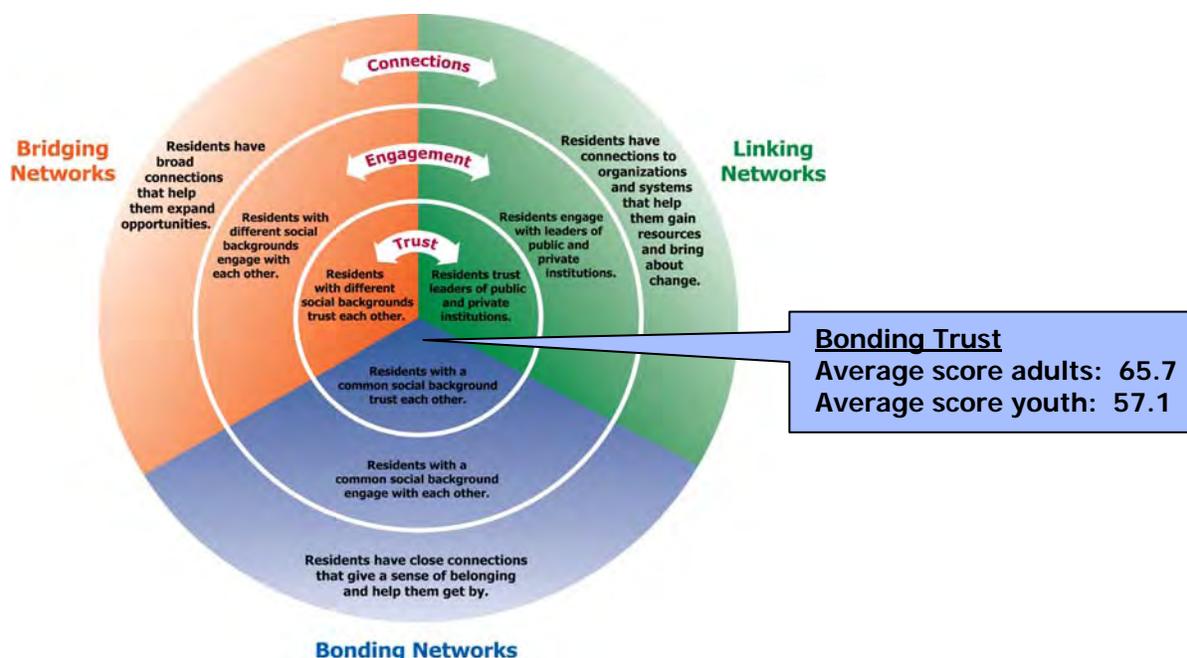
## Cook County's scores for the six measures

### Bonding Trust

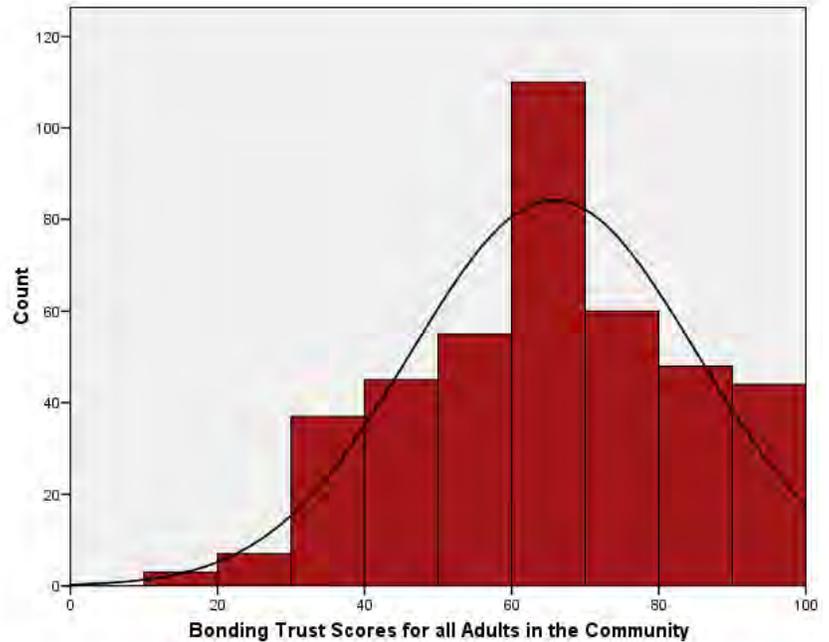
Bonding trust in Cook County is an area of strength. Adults had an average bonding trust level of 65.7, while youth averaged 57.1. The adult score for bonding trust was the highest of all six dimensions of social capital measured by the survey.

**Do residents with a common social background trust each other?**

**Figure 2. Bonding trust scores for Cook County youth and adults**



**Figure 3. Bonding trust distribution**



While averages are instructive, it is also helpful to look at the distribution of bonding trust in the community. Figure 3 shows the distribution of bonding trust levels in the community. The largest number of respondents scored in the 60s, while substantial numbers scored even higher. Very few adults in the community scored below 30 on this dimension of social capital.

Were there specific demographic factors that help explain differences in bonding trust in Cook County? As Table 4 shows, women had higher levels of bonding trust than men. Differences based on age categories, years of residence, education level, or household income were not statistically significant<sup>1</sup>, which means we cannot say with confidence that bonding trust levels were different based on these factors.

**Table 4. Differences in bonding trust among adults**

Gender	Women	67.4
	Men	62.7
Age	Bonding trust not significantly different among age groups.	
Length of residence in community	Bonding trust not significantly different among people with different lengths of residence.	
Education level	Bonding trust not significantly different among people with different levels of education.	
Household income	Bonding trust not significantly different among people with different levels of household income.	

<sup>1</sup> **DEFINITION FOR STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE:** A difference between two averages is called statistically significant if it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. So when we state that a difference between averages for adults and youth, high or low income groups, or education groups, is statistically significant, we mean that the difference is likely due to real differences in survey responses, not chance. When a difference between groups is not statistically significant, it is less meaningful because it very well could be due to chance.

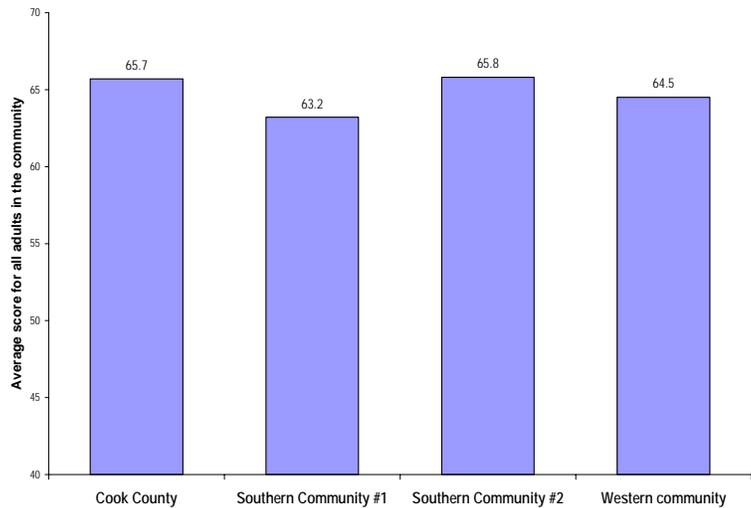
Specific survey items measuring bonding trust are shown in Table 5. Average responses to these questions were consistently high for adults. Respondents had far stronger trust in their groups of friends than in other groups.

**Table 5. Bonding trust items for adults and youth**

To what degree do you trust the following groups? (1=to a very small degree to 4=to a very great degree)	Adult average	Youth average
Your group of friends	N/A	3.3*
People at church or place of worship	3.1	2.8
People you go to work or school with	3.1	2.4
Your immediate neighbors	3.0	2.4
People in the same clubs or activities	2.8	2.7

**Figure 4. Bonding trust in Cook County compared with other pilot communities**

How did Cook County compare with other communities that participated in piloting the Our Community survey? Figure 4 compares the bonding trust levels in these communities. All four communities had bonding trust levels well above the 50 benchmark, suggesting that bonding trust is often strong in rural communities, and Cook County ranked second among the four pilot communities.

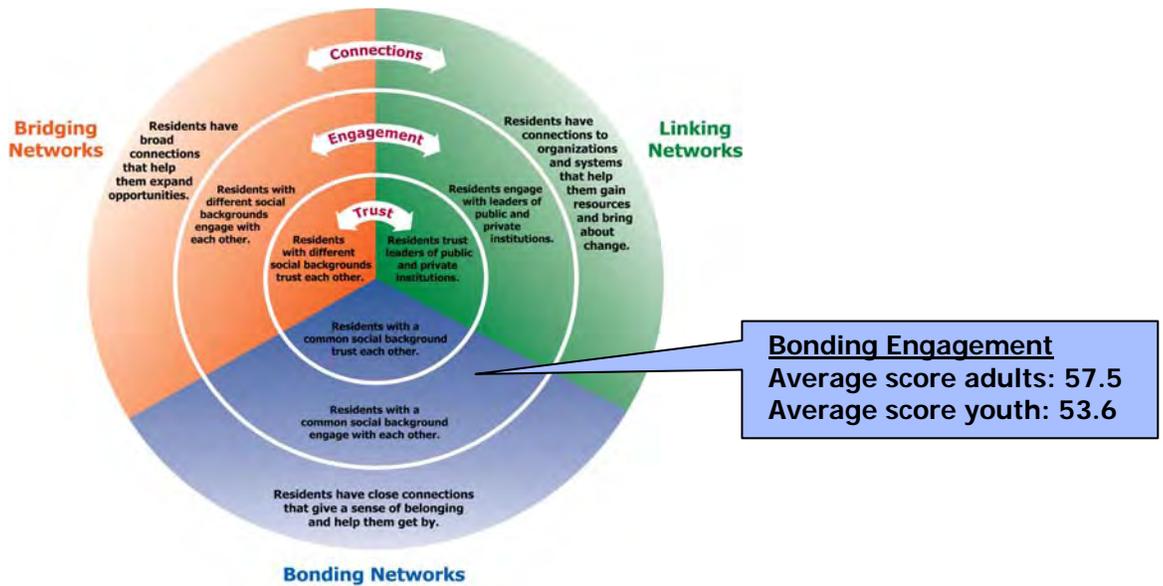


## Bonding Engagement

Bonding engagement levels in Cook County were somewhat lower than bonding trust levels as shown in Figure 5, but were still on the positive side of the 50 benchmark. Adults and youth had similar levels of bonding engagement.

**Do residents with a common social background engage with each other?**

**Figure 5. Bonding engagement averages for adults and youth**



**Figure 6. Bonding engagement distribution**

Figure 6 shows the very “normal” distribution of bonding engagement in the community. The vast majority of adult residents scored in the 50s and 60s on the scale, but a number of residents had either very low or very high levels of contact with people with whom they shared a common background.

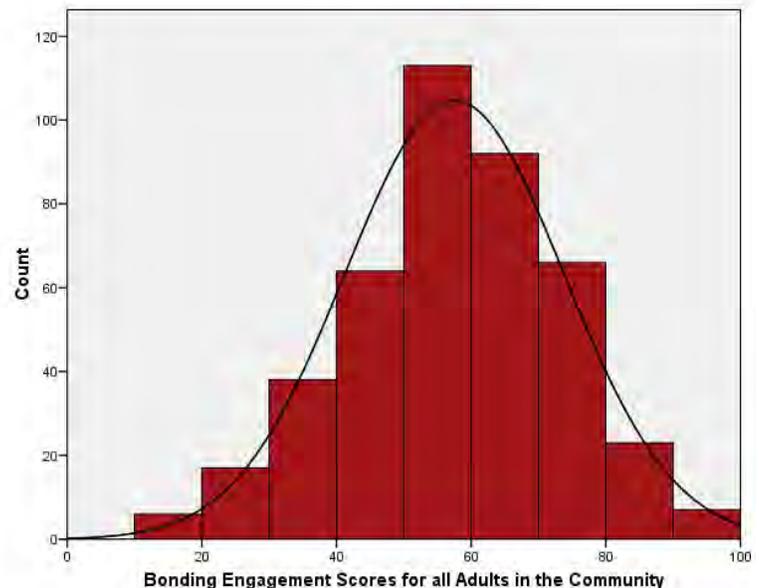


Table 6 provides information on the demographic factors that made a difference in bonding engagement. As was the case for bonding trust, women in Cook County were more likely to have higher amounts of bonding engagement than men. None of the other demographic factors seemed to make a difference in levels of bonding engagement.

**Table 6. Differences in bonding engagement among adults**

Gender	Women	60.5
	Men	52.1.
Age	Bonding engagement not significantly different among age groups.	
Length of residence in community	Bonding engagement not significantly different among people with different lengths of residence.	
Education level	Bonding engagement not significantly different among people with different levels of education.	
Household income	Bonding engagement not significantly different among people with different levels of household income.	

There were several questions in the survey that measured bonding engagement. Table 7 shows two of these questions, with findings from adults and youth. In both questions, adults were a bit more likely to respond “almost always.” About one fifth of adults rarely or never felt they could count on someone if they needed extra help. Those numbers were a little better for youth. Youth appeared less likely than adults to think people in the community do favors for each other.

**Table 7. Bonding engagement items for adults and youth**

		Almost always	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never
How often could you count on someone in the community if you needed extra help?	Adults	31.3%	25.9%	23.1%	14.4%	5.3%
	Youth	26.4%	31.9%	25.0%	12.5%	4.2%
How often do you and people in your community do favors for each other?	Adults	18.4%	43.4%	26.1%	10.1%	2.0%
	Youth	11.1%	34.7%	40.3%	9.7%	4.2%

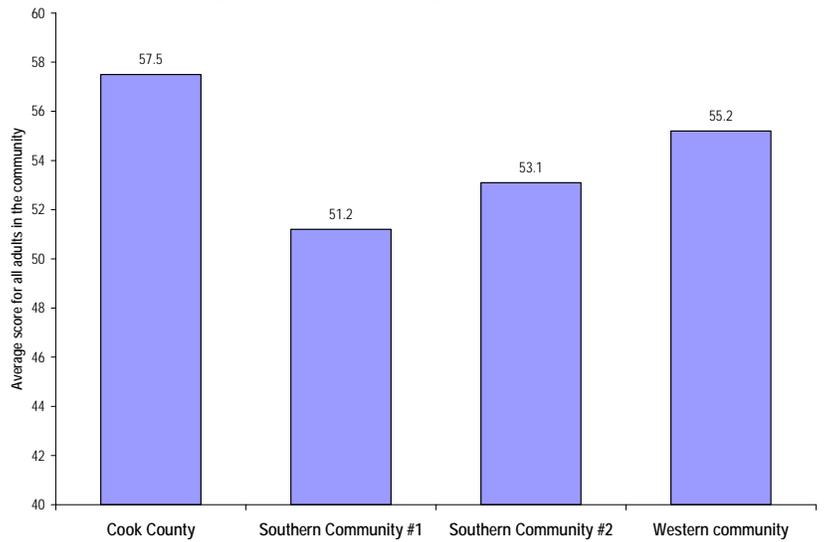
What gives Cook County residents a sense of belonging? Table 8 shows responses for adults and youth. For both adults and youth, family and friends were the strongest sources of bonding. Adults and youth responses were very similar with two exceptions. Respondents were more likely to get a sense of belonging from people who shared their ethnic background or from people they met online.

**Table 8. What gives Cook County residents a sense of belonging?**

Group	Averages (1=not at all to 4=to a great extent)	
	Adults	Youth
My long-term friends	3.6	3.5
My family	3.4	3.4
People who share my interests	3.1	3.2
People I work/go to school with	2.8	3.0
My place of worship	2.4	2.5
People who share my political views	2.3	n/a
People who share my ethnic background	1.9	2.5
People I have met online	1.1	1.6

Cook County had the strongest bonding engagement of the four communities that conducted this version of the Our Community survey. It is possible that the county’s remote location from urban centers may foster stronger contact and mutual support with family, friends, and neighbors.

**Figure 7. Bonding engagement in Cook County compared with other pilot communities**

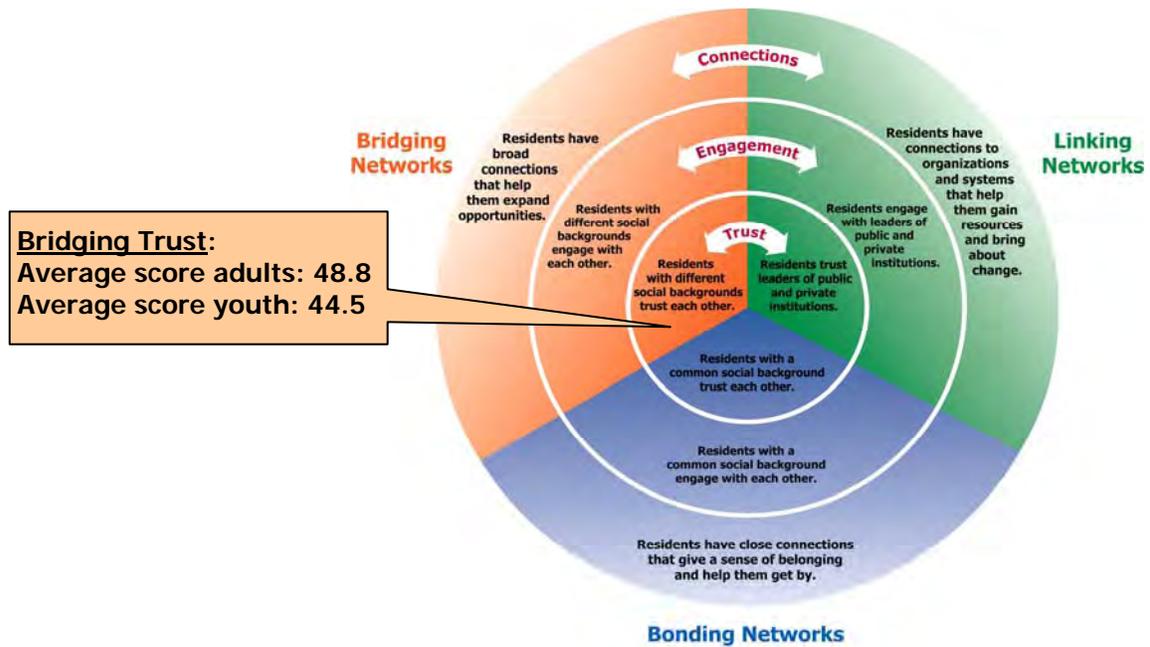


## Bridging Trust

Bridging trust levels in Cook County were below the 50 benchmark for both adults and youth. In fact, bridging trust was the lowest of the six social capital measures for the community. Building the level of bridging trust in Cook County will be crucial for increasing the overall social capital of the area.

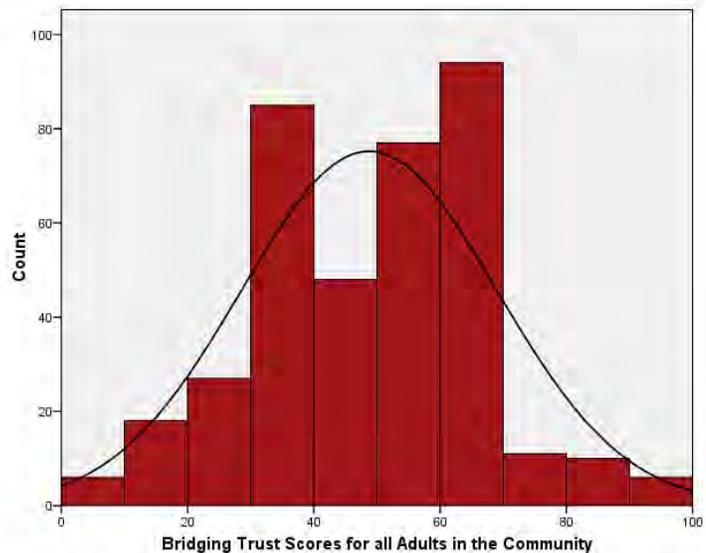
**Do residents with different social backgrounds trust each other?**

**Figure 8. Bridging trust averages for adults and youth**



**Figure 9. Bridging trust distribution**

Unlike the other dimensions of social capital, bridging trust is not “normally” distributed in Cook County. There is a bi-modal pattern with two “humps” rather than one. In Figure 9, note the relatively large number of people who scored in the 30s, 50s and 60s, and the small number of people who scored above 70. There tend to be two groups in the community, those with higher amounts of bridging trust (more trust in people different from themselves) and those with lower amounts (less trust, more afraid of people different from themselves).



What might explain these differences in bridging trust? As seen in Table 9, women had more bridging trust than men, people with more education had more bridging trust than people with less education – and there was a very interesting pattern by age with the youngest and oldest groups of adults having more bridging trust than middle age groups. Bridging trust was particularly low for adults in their 30s.

**Table 9. Differences in bridging trust among adults**

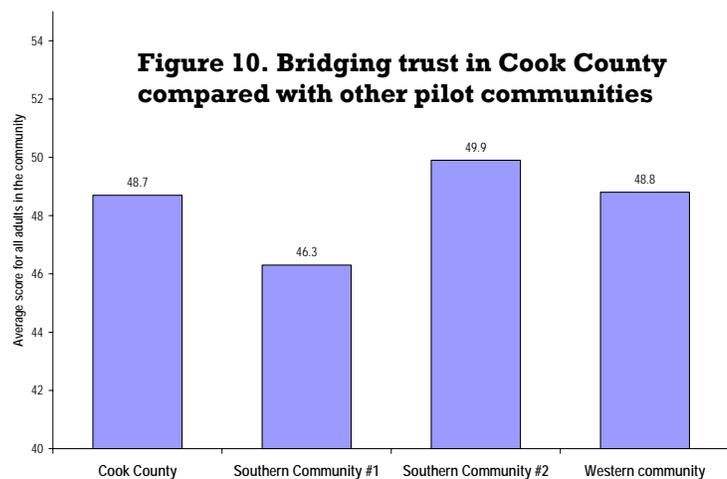
Gender	Women	50.8
	Men	45.0
Age	Age 18-29	51.6
	Age 30-39	42.8
	Age 40-49	47.2
	Age 50-59	47.5
	Age 60 or older	51.6
Length of residence in community	Bridging trust scores were not significantly different among people with different lengths of residence in Cook County.	
Education level	High school diploma or less	42.4
	Associate's degree or some college	46.5
	Bachelor's degree or beyond	51.3
Household income	Bridging trust was not significantly different among people with different levels of household income.	

Table 10 shows the results of specific survey items measuring bridging trust. Among both adults and youth, the least trust is in people new to the community. This suggests that an emphasis on reaching out to people new to the community may be an important way to improve social capital.

**Table 10. Bridging trust survey items**

To what degree do you trust the following? (1=to a very small degree to 4=to a very great degree)	Averages	
	Adults	Youth
People of other religious beliefs	2.6	2.5
People from other cultural or ethnic groups	2.5	2.4
People new to the community	2.3	2.1

All four communities surveyed to date have had bridging trust levels in the 40s. Cook County's bridging trust levels ranked third among the four communities surveyed to date, but the average scores for three of the four communities were very similar.

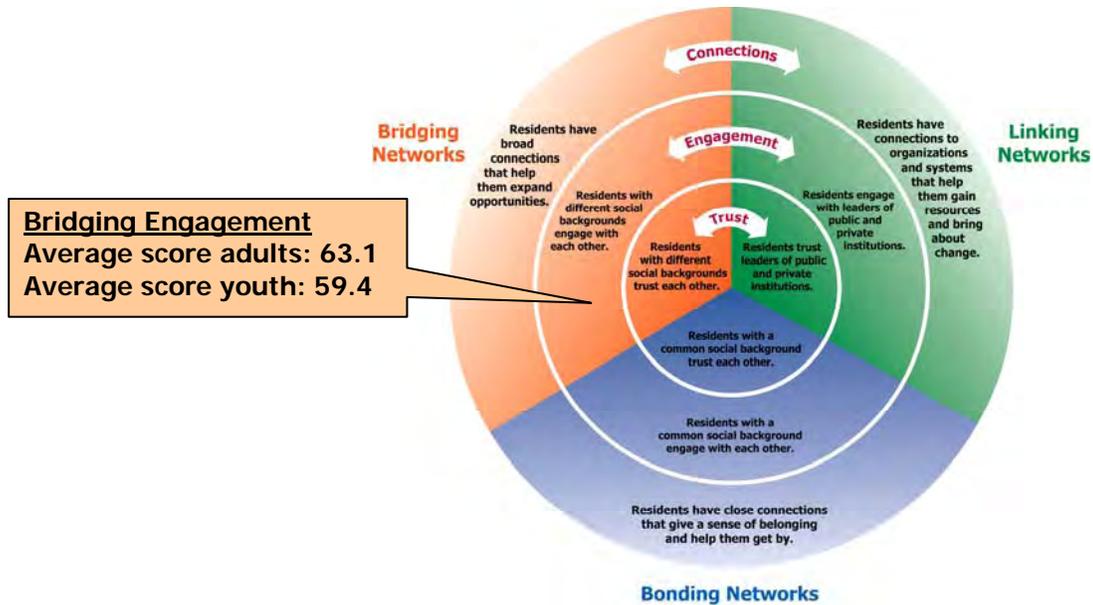


## Bridging Engagement

Bridging engagement in Cook County was stronger than bridging trust and almost as strong as bonding engagement. In fact, bridging engagement was the strongest dimension of social capital among the community's youth. The strong findings for bridging engagement may be a reflection of the high level of tourism in the county.

**Do residents with different social backgrounds engage with each other?**

**Figure 11. Bridging engagement averages for adults and youth**



**Figure 12. Bridging engagement distribution**

The vast majority of Cook County residents surveyed had bridging engagement scores in the 50s, 60s, or 70s. As compared with the other dimensions of social capital in the community, there were fewer very low and very high scores, suggesting that most community residents had a moderate level of contact with residents from different social backgrounds.

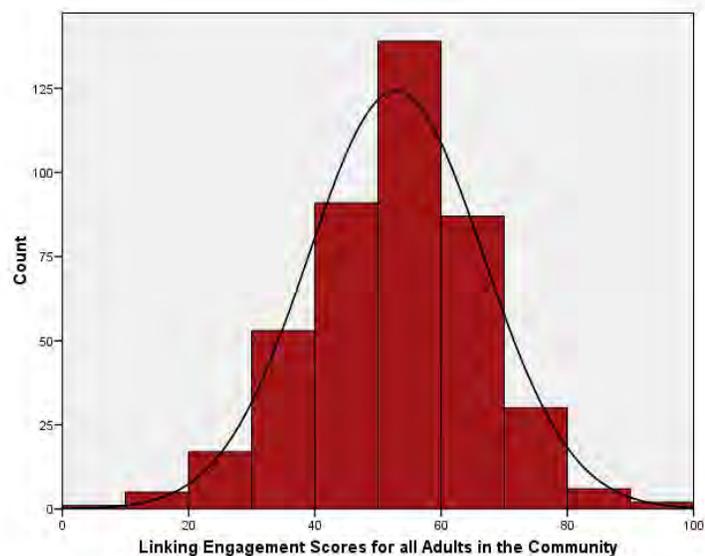


Table 11 shows the differences in bridging engagement based on demographic subgroups in the community. Interestingly, younger people had more bridging engagement than older people. (Note the very high score for people under age 30.) Women also scored higher on bridging engagement than men. This finding suggests that younger adults are a resource for the community in this important dimension of social capital.

**Table 11. Differences in bridging engagement among adults**

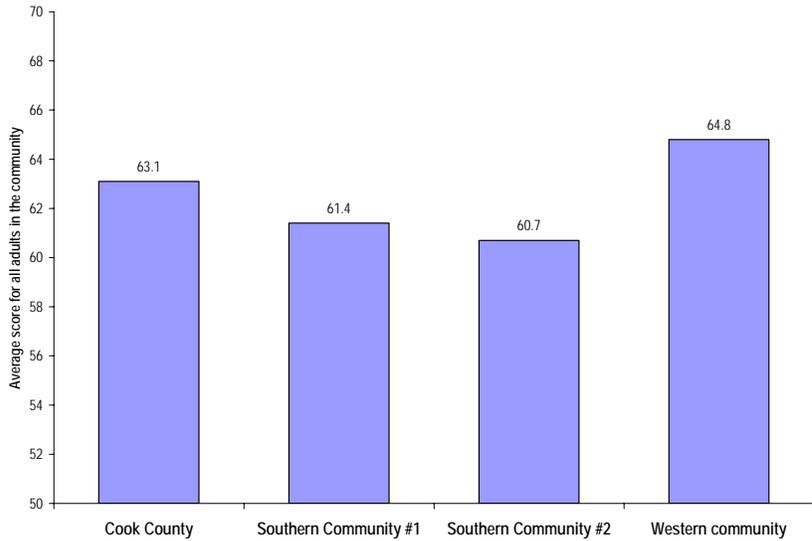
Gender	Women	64.9
	Men	59.6
Age	Age 18-29	70.5
	Age 30-39	66.8
	Age 40-49	64.3
	Age 50-59	65.4
	Age 60 or older	58.1
Length of residence in community	Bridging engagement not significantly different among people with different lengths of residence in Cook County.	
Education level	Bridging engagement not significantly different among people with different levels of education.	
Household income	Bridging engagement not significantly different among people with different levels of household income.	

Table 12 shows the responses to several of the survey items on bridging engagement. Youth reported that they had less contact than adults with people much poorer than themselves (or perhaps they did not know). Youth had much more contact with people from different racial or ethnic background. Adults reported more contact than youth with people with disabilities.

**Table 12. Bridging engagement survey items for youth and adults**

In the past month, how often have you had contact with the following categories of people?		Not at all	Once or twice	Three or four times	Five or more times
People who have a different religion than me	Adults	4.3%	16.2%	23.2%	56.2%
	Youth	6.9%	15.5%	12.1%	65.5%
People much poorer than me	Adults	6.0%	23.6%	27.5%	42.9%
	Youth	16.9%	28.8%	18.6%	35.6%
People of a different race or ethnicity than me	Adults	11.3%	39.8%	22.1%	26.8%
	Youth	9.5%	27.0%	14.3%	49.2%
People with disabilities	Adults	13.6%	48.6%	19.6%	18.1%
	Youth	25.8%	41.9%	16.1%	16.1%

**Figure 13. Bridging engagement in Cook County compared with other pilot communities**



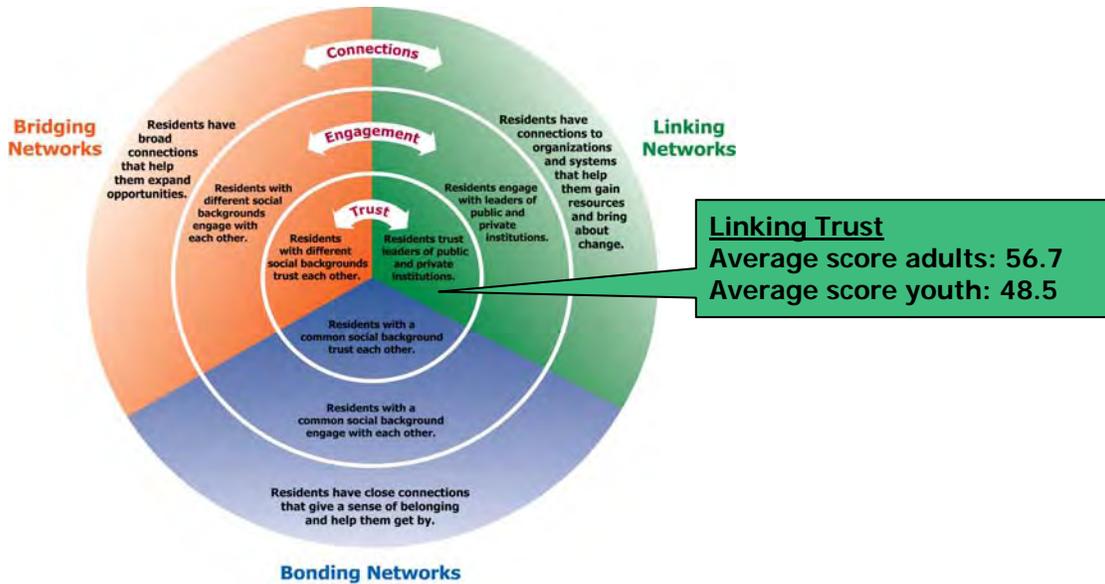
Cook County ranked second among the four pilot communities in bridging engagement. All four communities had bridging engagement averages in the 60s.

**Linking Trust**

Cook County residents have a moderate level of trust in leaders of public and private institutions. Adults tended to have a higher level of trust than youth. For adults as well as youth, linking trust was stronger than bridging trust, but not as strong as bonding trust.

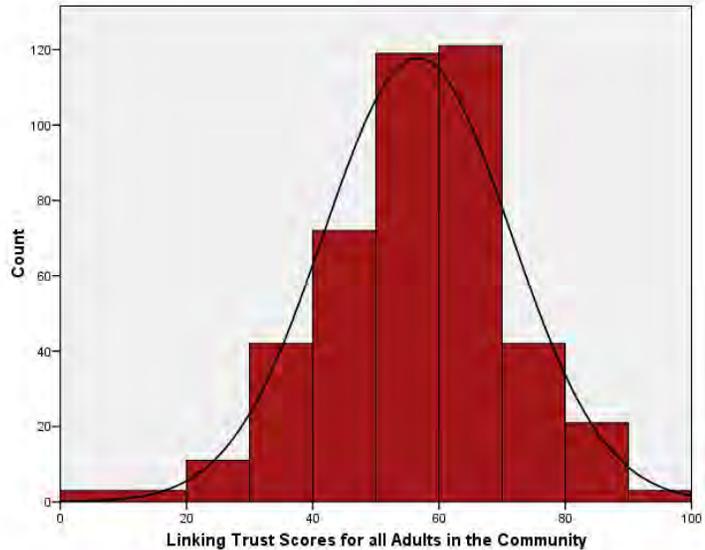
**Do residents trust leaders of public and private institutions?**

**Figure 14. Linking trust averages for adults and youth**



**Figure 15. Linking trust distribution**

Figure 15 shows the distribution of linking trust among survey respondents. Most of Cook County’s respondents had linking trust levels in the 50s or 60s. A sizable number of residents had scores in the 30s and 40s, however.



Higher levels of linking trust in Cook County appear to be related to gender and income. Women were more likely than men to have higher linking trust, as were middle- and high-income community residents.

**Table 13. Differences in linking trust among adults**

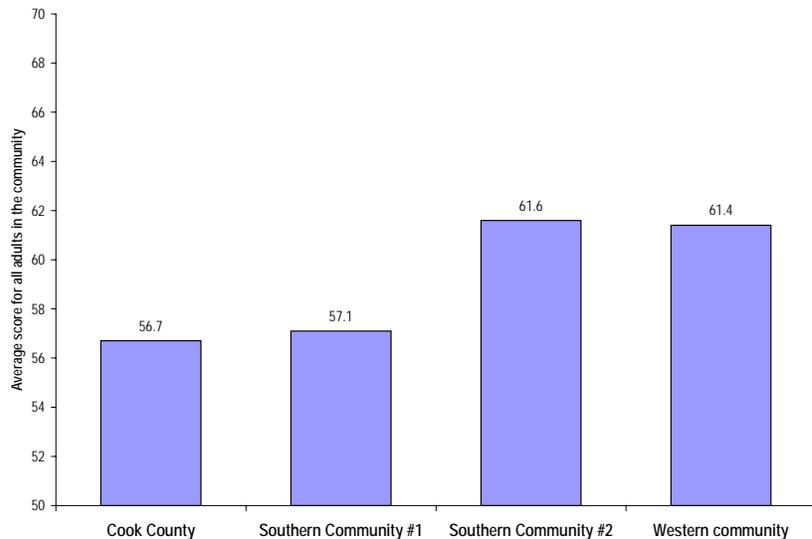
Gender	Women	58.0
	Men	54.3
Age	Linking trust was not significantly different among age groups.	
Length of residence in community	Linking trust was not significantly different among people with different lengths of residence in Cook County.	
Education level	Linking trust was not significantly different among people with different levels of education.	
Household income	Low income (less than \$25,000)	53.3
	Moderate income (\$25,000 to \$44,999)	54.6
	Middle income (\$45,000 to \$74,999)	58.5
	High income (\$75,000 or more)	58.7

Which leaders or institutions were most trusted? Residents of Cook County tended to have the most trust in health care, education, and law enforcement professionals. As seen in Table 14, local news media and local government officials didn’t fare as well in terms of trust. Youth were less trusting than adults of the local news media as well as law enforcement. Increasing levels of trust in local government may be an important focal point for community action.

**Table 14. Linking trust survey items for youth and adults**

To what degree do you trust the following? Group	Averages (1=to a very small degree to 4=to a very great degree)	
	Adults	Youth
Nurses / doctors	3.1	2.7
Teachers / educators	2.9	2.6
People in law enforcement	2.9	2.4
Business people	2.4	2.1
The local news media	2.4	1.9
Local government officials	2.2	2.1

**Figure 16. Linking trust in Cook County compared with other pilot communities**



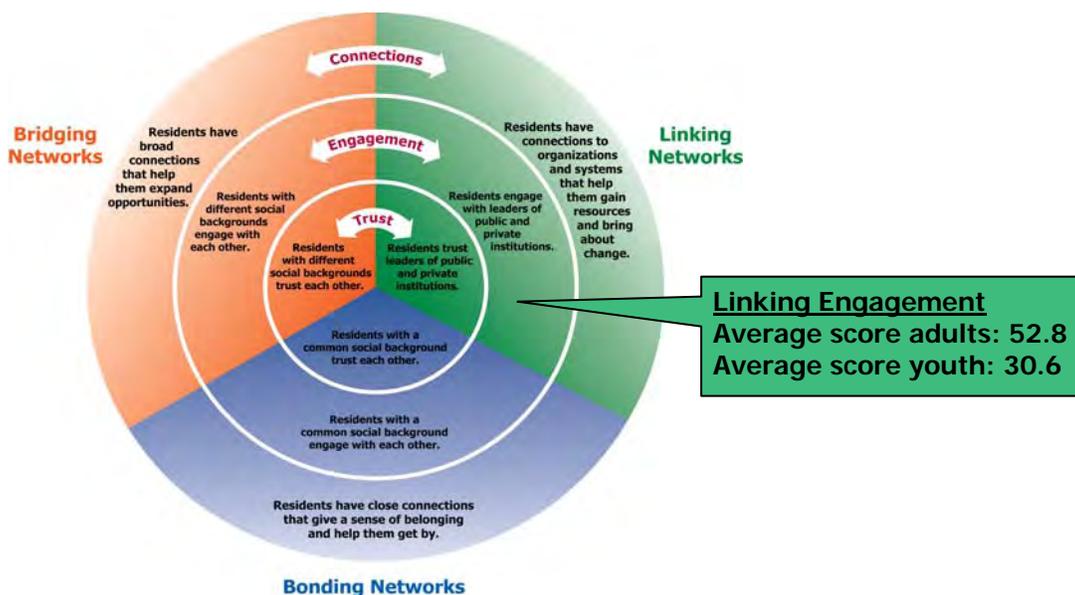
How does Cook County compare with other pilot communities in linking trust? As shown in Figure 16, Cook County had the lowest level of linking trust among the four communities surveyed to date.

**Linking Engagement**

Linking engagement, what most people think of as *civic* engagement, was moderate for adults and very low for youth in Cook County as shown in Figure 17. Linking engagement was the weakest form of engagement (as compared with bonding and bridging engagement) for both adults and youth. The moderate average for adults suggests a need to identify and reach out to adults in the community who are currently disengaged, and the large gap between adults and youth suggests a need to more intentionally include community youth in planning, making decisions, and gathering input.

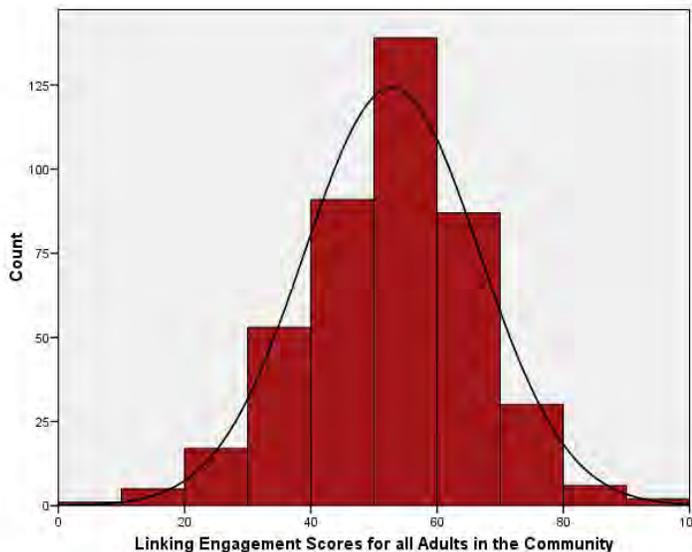
**Do residents engage with leaders of public and private institutions?**

**Figure 17. Linking engagement averages for adults and youth**



**Figure 18. Linking engagement distribution**

As seen in Figure 18, linking engagement was normally distributed among adults in the community. The largest group of respondents scored in the 50s on this scale. Very few adults scored below 30 or above 80.



Which factors were associated with higher levels of linking engagement? Gender was the only demographic factor that did *not* appear to make a difference in bridging engagement (see Table 15). Younger adults (ages 18-29) had much less linking engagement than all other categories (adults 30 or older). Long-term and short-term residents had less linking engagement than mid-termers (an unusual pattern). Higher education and higher income residents also had more linking trust.

**Table 15. Differences in linking engagement among adults**

Gender	Linking engagement was not significantly different among women and men in Waseca.	
Age	Age 18-29	43.8
	Age 30-39	51.6
	Age 40-49	50.8
	Age 50-59	54.9
	Age 60 or older	54.3
Length of residence in community	Less than five years	40.2
	Five to 19 years	54.3
	20 or more years	52.3
Education level	High school diploma or less	51.1
	Associate's degree or some college	50.7
	Bachelor's degree or beyond	54.6
Household income	Low income (less than \$25,000)	47.7
	Moderate income (\$25,000 to \$44,999)	52.5
	Middle income (\$45,000 to \$74,999)	54.2
	High income (\$75,000 or more)	55.6

Table 16 shows several of the survey questions used to measure linking engagement. The biggest difference between youth and adults was in donation of money and attendance at public meetings, even those impacting the schools.

**Table 16. Linking engagement survey items for youth and adults**

How many times in the past twelve months have you?		None	1 to 6 times	7 to 12 times	More than 12 times
Donated money, goods, or services to a charity?	Adults	7.7%	37.5%	26.7%	28.1%
	Youth	39.4%	47.9%	5.6%	7.0%
Attended any public meeting in which there was discussion of school or town affairs?	Adults	31.3%	51.2%	7.0%	10.5%
	Youth	59.2%	35.2%	4.2%	1.4%
Joined together with others in your community to address an issue?	Adults	34.8%	45.6%	10.6%	8.9%
	Youth	61.4%	35.7%	1.4%	1.4%
Been In the home of a community leader or had one in your home?	Adults	43.2%	44.8%	7.7%	4.2%
	Youth	66.2%	29.6%	2.8%	1.4%
Tried to get your local government to pay attention to something that concerned you?	Adults	44.8%	41.3%	8.2%	5.6%
	Youth	78.6%	20.0%	1.4%	0.0%

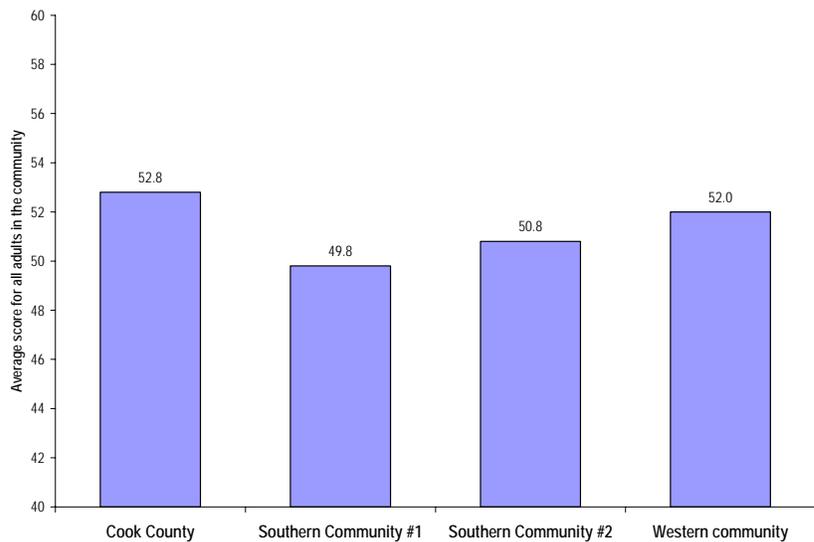
**Why are people disengaged?** The survey asked residents to rank the severity of several obstacles to civic participation. The results of this question are shown in Table 17. Issues related to time demands were the biggest obstacles to participation (the lower the average, the bigger the obstacle). The findings suggest the need to find ways to help people to “multi-task” during their work days to stay engaged with community affairs.

**Table 17. Obstacles to civic participation**

Obstacle (1=very large, 2=somewhat large, 3=not at all large)	Average
Conflicting time demands	2.1
An inflexible or demanding work schedule	2.1
Commuting time for work/meetings	2.4
Practical problems like child care or transportation	2.5
Concerns about costs of transportation	2.5
Lack of information or not knowing where to begin	2.6
Feeling that you can't make a difference	2.6
Feeling unwelcome	2.7
Personal health concerns	2.7

**Figure 19. Linking engagement in Cook County compared with other pilot communities**

Figure 19 compares the linking engagement in Cook County to the other pilot communities. Average linking engagement was higher in Cook County than in the other communities, but all four communities had very modest levels of this type of engagement.

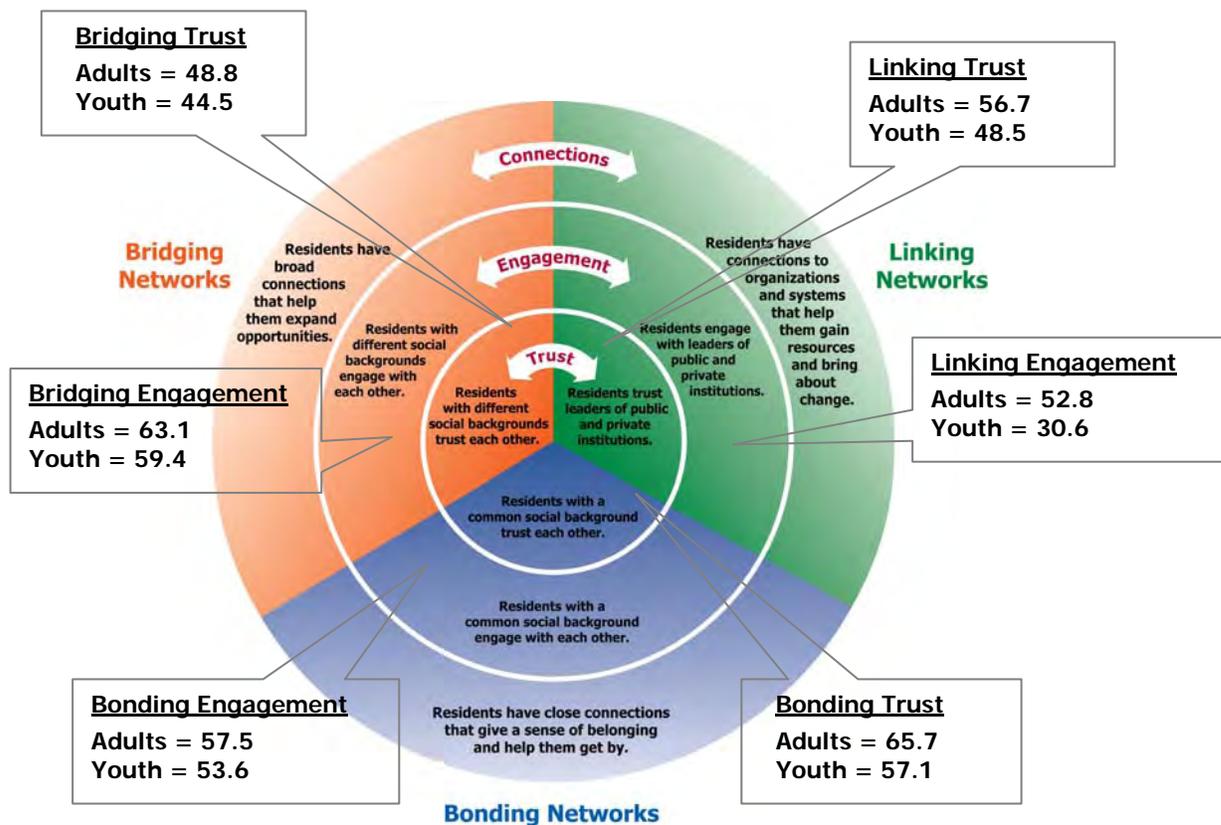


# A Closer Look

## The whole picture

Figure 20 shows the whole social capital picture for Cook County adults and youth. Overall, the picture is a positive one with adult averages over 50 for five of the six scales. The areas of strength for Cook County, with adult averages over 60, are bridging engagement and bonding trust. There are high levels of contact among people from differing social backgrounds, and high levels of trust among people with common backgrounds. The areas of strength for youth are bridging engagement and bonding trust, but in general Cook County’s youth have lower levels of social capital than adults. Knowing these areas of strength is important for planning action to improve the other dimensions of social capital, most notably bridging trust, linking trust and linking engagement.

**Figure 20. The whole picture for adults and youth**

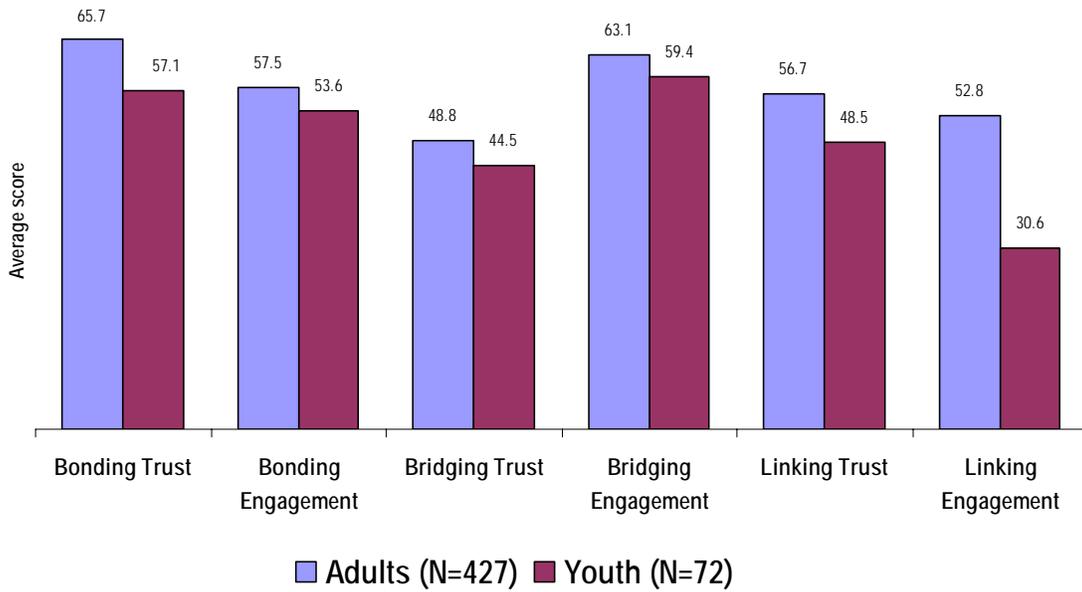


## Comparison charts

### Differences between adults and youth

As shown in Figure 21, there were gaps between adult and youth scores on every dimension of social capital, but the most notable were in linking engagement, bonding trust, and linking trust. One of the challenges facing Cook County will be to figure out ways to build trust and involvement of youth in community issues.

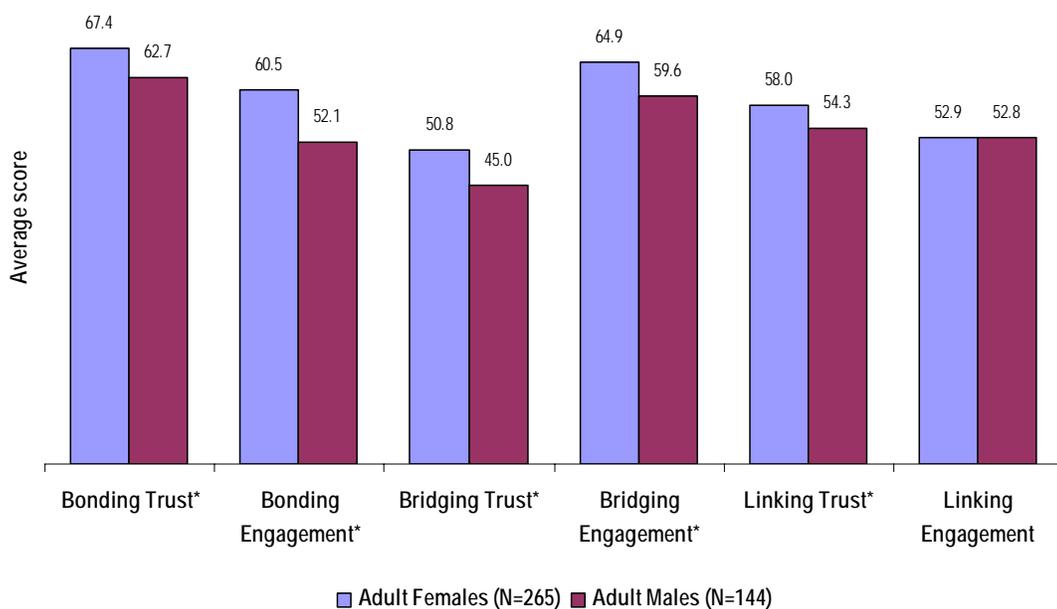
**Figure 21. Differences between adults and youth across the six social capital scales**



**Differences among adult men and women**

Cook County’s women tended to have higher levels of social capital than men. Average levels of bonding trust and engagement, bridging trust and engagement, and linking trust were all significantly higher for women than men. The only exception to this pattern was linking engagement, which was virtually identical for women and men. The challenge for the community will be to identify ways to build bonding and bridging trust and connections among men.

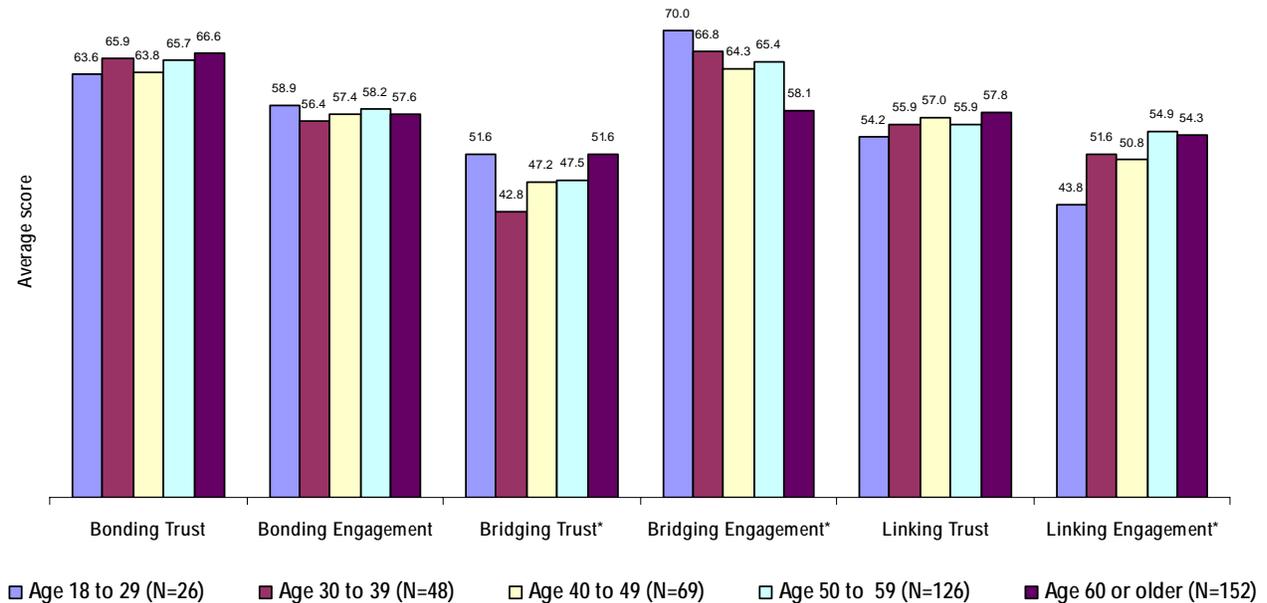
**Figure 22. Differences between men and women across the six social capital scales**



## Differences among age groups in the community

Age groups were significantly different in several dimension of social capital. Younger adults had higher levels of bridging trust and engagement than other age groups. Averages for bridging trust among adults in their 30s were much lower than bridging trust averages for younger and older adults. The pattern for linking engagement was also significant, but in this case younger adults had lower levels of linking engagement. Age was not a significant factor in bonding trust, bonding engagement, or linking trust.

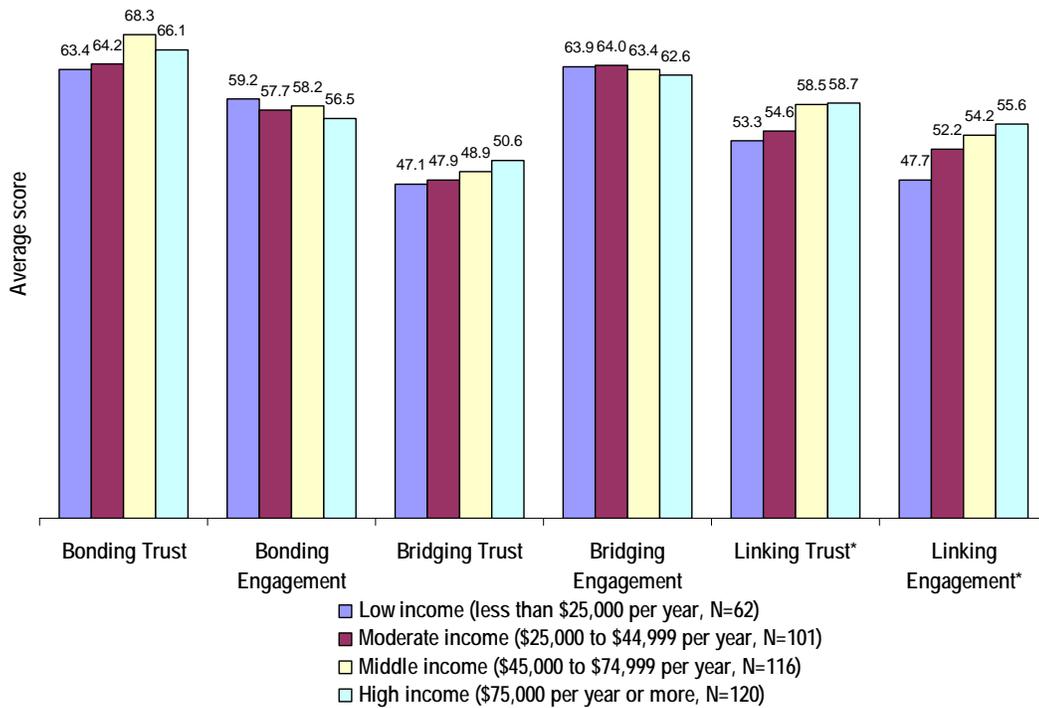
**Figure 23. Differences between age groups across the six social capital scales**



## Differences among income groups in the community

Income was a factor for both linking trust and linking engagement in Cook County. People from low income households had the lowest levels of linking trust and engagement, suggesting the need to identify ways to opportunities to better engage low income residents in community life. An important part of the story in Cook County, however, is the lack of influence of income levels on bonding and bridging networks. As shown in Figure 24, residents with lower incomes did not have significantly lower levels of bonding trust, bonding engagement, bridging trust or bridging engagement. In other communities surveyed to date, people from lower income households had significantly lower levels of most of the dimensions of social capital.

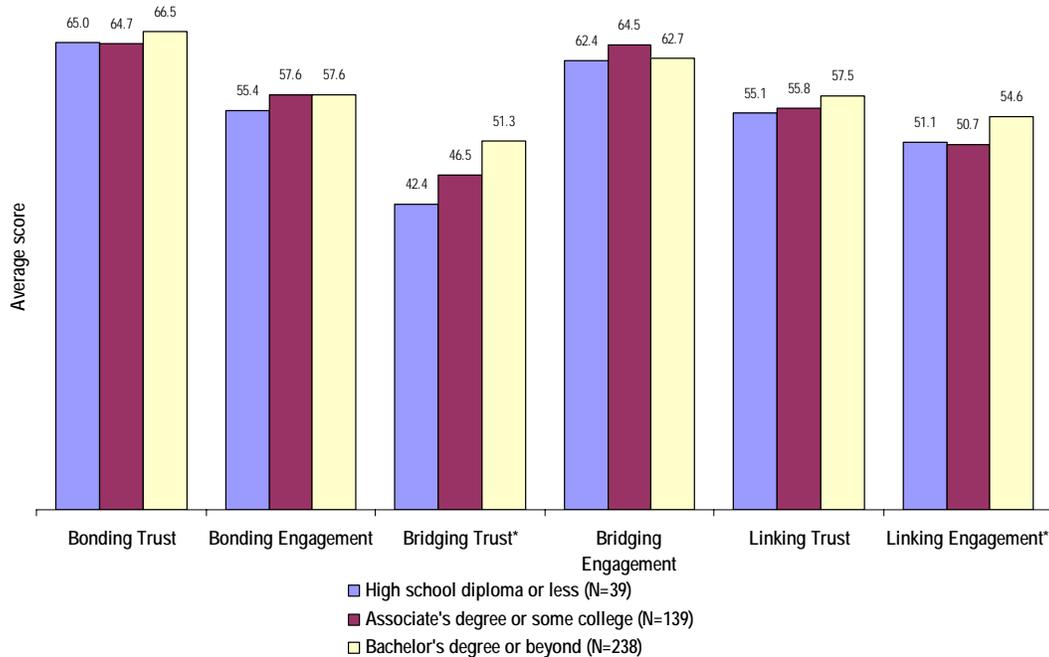
**Figure 24. Differences between income levels across the six social capital scales**



**Differences by education level in the community**

Educational differences among adults had a significant relationship in two of six social capital measurement scales -- bridging trust and linking engagement. In each of these dimensions, those with more formal education had higher scores. This pattern suggests the importance of reaching out to adults with less formal education in efforts to strengthen bridging trust and civic engagement in the community.

**Figure 25. Differences between education levels across the six social capital scales**



## Community Input

A presentation of findings was shared with the planning team on June 3, 2008. At that time, individuals had the following comments to offer as they reflected on the information. They noted that:

- ▶ There was a bridging disconnect between youth and adults. Youth are not engaged to their potential with the adult population.
- ▶ The highest lack of trust within Cook County was with the government sector.
- ▶ Gender made a difference in Cook County as to responses to the survey. There was more social capital among the female gender.
- ▶ Some of the information presented was what many perceived as “the way it is here” – and the survey confirms those perceptions.
- ▶ It can be hard to get connected and accepted by the community if you are a newcomer.

The information is of interest, but we are most concerned with the bottom line: *What does this mean for our community? How do we use this information? Who moves this forward? What do we do to benefit Cook County?*

## Insights for Action

### Strengthening networks

Things you can do to strengthen **bonding networks** are....

- Turn off the TV and computer and spend time with others
- Participate in groups, clubs, and community activities
- Play games or cards with your neighbors
- Join a project with others with similar interests
- Exercise together or take walks with family or friends
- Form or join a bowling team, golf team or other sport
- Hold a neighborhood get together

Things you can do to strengthen **bridging networks** include....

- Welcome new and lonely residents and youth into activities
- Volunteer in your area of interest
- Invite and support people from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds to be involved

Some things you can do to strengthen **linking networks** are....

- Provide input into community issues and decisions
- Link your outside contacts to needs and interests of the community
- Attend regional, statewide or national meetings
- Help create a shared agenda to be funded
- Form a regional or statewide network

## Community strengths to build on

- ▶ Residents of Cook County are willing to volunteer of their time and talents.
- ▶ Bonding trust in Cook County is an area of strength for both the youth and adult audiences.
- ▶ Family and friends are a strong source of bonding. There is a high level of trust among people with common backgrounds.
- ▶ Bridging engagement is high among adults in Cook County.
- ▶ Young adults (18-29) have very strong bridging networks.



### Resources in the Community

How can these assets be tapped to the benefit of the whole community?

## Areas for attention



### Focus Areas in the Community

- ▶ Cook County youth are less trusting and less engaged than adults.
- ▶ There is a low level of trust within Cook County of the government sector.
- ▶ Youth appeared less likely than adults to believe that people in the community do favors for them. This could indicate that youth may not feel they have adequate support or safety net.
- ▶ Bridging trust levels in Cook County were low for both adults and youth. It was the lowest of all six social capital measures for the community. Building the level of bridging trust in Cook County will be crucial for increasing the overall of social capital.

How can Cook County strengthen these areas of social capital?

## Next steps for Cook County

### We will:

- Analyze the bonding, bridging and linking networks and analyze ways to leverage the strengths to build upon weaker areas.
- Share presentations on survey data with local clubs and groups to generate discussion.
- Use the media to share survey results to encourage the community to begin thinking about how to leverage their social capital assets to strengthen bridging trust in the county.
- Sponsor action planning events to engage the community in building social capital.



**Next Step Plans:  
Community Planning  
Team...**



**Next Step Suggestions:  
Community Groups and  
Clubs...**

**Groups can:**

- Reach out to those with less social capital to include them in networks
- Be intentional in building social capital as you go about your work
- Consider training in leadership and facilitation

**You can:**

- Read more about social capital
- Capitalize on your own social capital to build and strengthen networks.
- Get involved in your community!



**Next Step Suggestions:  
Individuals...**

Social capital is built through hundreds of actions, large and small, that you take every day.

- ▶ Seek ways to nurture trusting relationships.
- ▶ Engage with others in your community.
- ▶ Get involved.

**Each one of us in our own way is a builder of social capital.**

## References

Scheffert, Donna Rae, Jody Horntvedt and Scott Chazdon, *Social Capital and Your Community*, University of Minnesota Extension Service, May 2008.

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## Thanks

Our thanks to the residents of Cook County for their input throughout this assessment process.

## Source

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