

Community Capitals: A Tool for Evaluating Strategic Interventions and Projects

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To understand how communities function, Flora and Flora (2004) developed the Community Capitals framework. Based on their analyses of entrepreneurial communities, they determined that the communities that were successful in supporting healthy sustainable community and economic development (CED) paid attention to seven types of capital: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial and built. Beyond identifying the capitals and their role in community economic development, this approach focuses on the interaction among these seven capitals and how they build upon one another.

This framework is used not only as a tool for analysis, but also as a way to assist project managers in identifying key boundary partners. By identifying which agencies or organizations link to each of the community capitals, project managers can determine which organizations with which to partner. Once partners are identified, the framework can then be employed to determine what each partner may need to do in order for the partnership to be successful.

Using the Community Capitals framework, project managers and evaluators can trace how an investment in human capital, for example leadership training, might impact financial capital as leaders use their skills to acquire new funds and better manage existing funds. Social capital may then be impacted as members of the leadership program develop new bonds among themselves

and new bridges among the groups with whom they interact. The same leadership course might consequently expand political capital by providing information about how the political system works and how to access resources within the community; it could also help participants develop key linkages to other sources of political power.

Finally, the interaction with representatives from different community groups may expand the cultural capital in the community as people learn to value the voices and heritages of others.

The Community Capitals model has become an invaluable tool in the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development's work with the National Rural Funders' Collaborative.

This framework helps project staff and funders better understand the strategic nature of the funded programs and their impact on reducing poverty, creating wealth, supporting family self-sufficiency, and expanding local leadership. NCRCD's research focus with the Benedum Foundation addresses the question: Is CED possible in rural communities with populations less than 10,000 people? By measuring the investments in each of the capitals and the changes resulting from that investment, the framework provides a means by which researchers begin to understand the impact of CED on rural people and places.



