Vibrant Communities
TAMARACK INSTITUTE

REDUCING POVERTY
DEEPENING COMMUNITY
BUILDING YOUTH FUTURES
CLIMATE TRANSITIONS

ARTICLE | EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

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Atlantic Canada has been uniquely positioned during the global Coronavirus outbreak. Among the other provinces in Canada and compared to many nations of the world, they are experiencing relative safety and holding up better than others, both in terms of the spread of the virus and local experience of COVID-mortality. Is it because of the lower population density, leadership in senior healthcare ranks and community participation in mask-wearing and physical distancing? These are important factors but cannot be separated from another strong influencer: social capital.

MAKING THE CASE FOR SOCIAL CAPITAL

In a recent study from MIT and University of Toronto, social capital was defined as relationships that bind us together as a community, based on trust, connection, and care. In this study, regions with higher-than-average social capital are showing direct links to lower infection rates and fewer deaths from COVID.
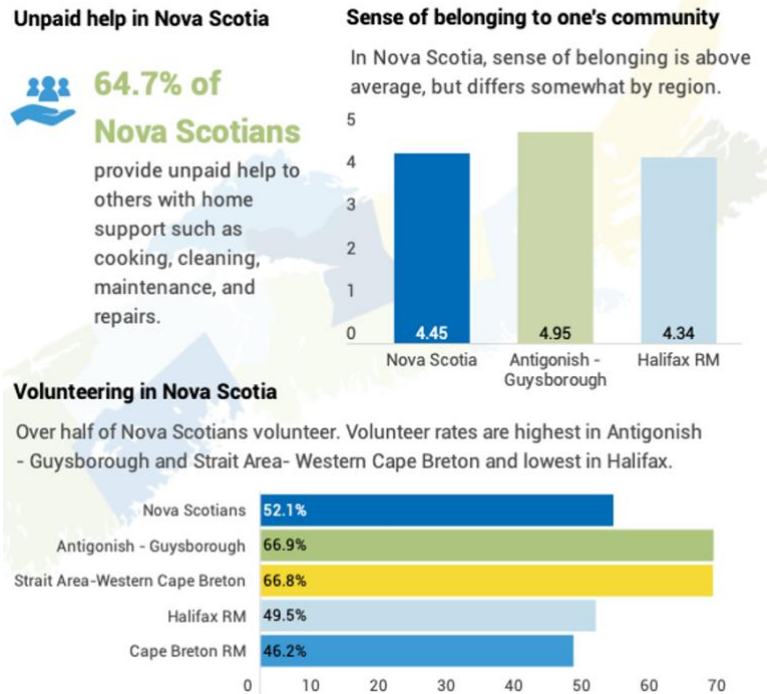
According to this study, it was ultimately "collective efficacy" (or the likelihood that people would lean in, help out, reach out) that was the key factor in setting a high rate of social capital. Communities with higher social capital show stronger positive health outcomes during the pandemic, alongside primary success factors like access to healthcare services and a strong family support system. How much of the success of the Atlantic region's response to the pandemic is connected to existing social capital?

Stable families, the trust we show towards institutions, tendencies to help out as volunteers in our communities are telltale signs of a community with a deep pool of social capital. Baseline data collected in Nova Scotia by the Quality of Life Index, published in early 2020, shows that many of these success factors were in place in this region before the pandemic. This evidence explains the success of the community response to the challenging mitigation measures like

> " **The more that norms and trust encourage smart behavior, and the more that people in a community can be kind and loving of one another, the more they'll be able to mitigate the transmission of the virus without extra resources [or in spite of crowding]** "
>
> Christos Makridis

lockdowns, closures and travel restrictions. From this we have learned that investing in social capital pays off during a crisis.

Unpaid help in Nova Scotia

64.7% of Nova Scotians provide unpaid help to others with home support such as cooking, cleaning, maintenance, and repairs.

Sense of belonging to one's community

In Nova Scotia, sense of belonging is above average, but differs somewhat by region.

Region	Value
Nova Scotia	4.45
Antigonish - Guysborough	4.95
Halifax RM	4.34

Volunteering in Nova Scotia

Over half of Nova Scotians volunteer. Volunteer rates are highest in Antigonish - Guysborough and Strait Area- Western Cape Breton and lowest in Halifax.

Region	Rate
Nova Scotians	52.1%
Antigonish - Guysborough	66.9%
Strait Area-Western Cape Breton	66.8%
Halifax RM	49.5%
Cape Breton RM	46.2%

Source: Engage Nova Scotia

These facts make it all the more important to consider social capital in context of campaigns dedicated to #buildbackbetter. Are we capitalizing on what we've learned about these key success factors to protect or launch initiatives that build back stronger social capital? And most importantly, where can we turn for people and teams who will be trusted to lead this work?

The Endleman Trust Barometer has studied the shift in trust for more than 20 years. We know that people grant their trust based on two distinct attributes: competence (delivering on promises) and ethical behavior (doing the right thing and working to improve society). In the study conducted in 2020, we've learned that globally none of the four institutions (Media, NGOs, Government, Business) are seen as both simultaneously competent and ethical. Business ranks highest in competence, and NGOs lead on ethical behavior while Government and media are perceived as both incompetent and unethical. So where will we turn for trusted leaders for rebuilding post pandemic? Community-led initiatives, designed by, in and for community will be key contributors to this essential service and will need our support.

"Because of the role that social capital plays, you can mobilize support and mobilize actions at a local level, even if it's not happening at a federal level," Christos Makridis said in his report, funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. "It might seem really simple and common sense, but it's worth repeating: If you love one another, that's the starting point," he says.

There is a tremendous amount of love and support within communities in NS - not organized by government or institutions and often under- or even unrecognized for the impact it can have. Neighbourhood-led projects have organized meals to share when it is time to celebrate or time to

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grieve. Strangers will stop to help change a tire or shovel a driveway. Friends will call to check-in on folks who have been spending too much time alone. These unsung actions are equal partners to the essential service workers and will continue to quietly go about their work long after the state of emergency is over because of the strength of regional social capital.

Knowing what we know now about the impact of social capital, successful leaders in the next era need to think more broadly about supporting and funding trusted neighborhood projects who are creating the conditions necessary to rebuild more effective systems and institutions post-pandemic. We need to call for and support initiatives that draw together community at the grassroots-level because this is where essential social capital is being built. In order to keep building leadership in this field we will also need to rethink how these often small and under-resourced actions and projects are funded for sustainability to achieve the outcomes we all need. Our collective success depends on the continuation of neighbourhood work, quietly weaving and reinforcing trust, connection, and care. In order to have access to similar success in the future, it is the time for a new model of partnership between funders and trusted leaders of neighbourhood-level work.

RESOURCES

- Read article: Building social capital through bartering, learning and relationships
- Watch webinar: Building Social Capital through Community Development
- Visit the Cities Deepening Community website
- Learn more about the current Cities Deepening Community Member
- Learn how to become a Cities Deepening Community Member

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