Bridging and Bonding

How Can We Create Engaged Communities in a Time of Rapid Change?

Online Social Media

Engaged neighborhoods

GENERAL FEDERATION of WOMEN'S CLUBS

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GENERAL FEDERATION *of* WOMEN'S CLUBS

The **General Federation of Women's Clubs** is an international women's organization dedicated to community improvement by enhancing the lives of others through volunteer service. With more than 100,000 members in affiliated clubs in every state, the District of Columbia, and more than a dozen countries, GFWC members work in their own communities to support the arts, preserve natural resources, advance education, promote healthy lifestyles, encourage civic involvement, and work toward world peace and understanding. For more information, please visit www.GFWC.org.

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Bridging and Bonding: How Can We Create Engaged Communities in a Time of Rapid Change?

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When he was growing up, Mark Lampert's dad was out the door by 4:30 a.m. every morning for a long commute to work. But because his mom was a full-time homemaker, everyone was at the table each evening by 6:00 p.m. for dinner. Today Mark lives with his wife, April, in Washington, DC. Both have careers with demanding schedules. Like his dad, Mark has a long commute and the couple seldom sits down to dinner before 9:00 p.m. It's a trade-off he's willing to make for his dream job as a video-game sound designer. While Mark and April plan to have children some day, adding those responsibilities to their daily routines will be daunting.

About 45 years ago, when Mark's parents were graduating from high school, only 35 percent of married women worked outside the home. Today there are fewer such "breadwinner" husbands and "homemaker" wives. Since 1994, 61 percent of married women work full time. And 60 percent of married women with children under 3 years old are currently working full time, compared to 21 percent in 1966.

The Problem

These and other changes have dramatically impacted community life. The effects can be measured by looking at the decline in the number of people who volunteer their services, participate in groups like clubs and civic organizations, follow current events, or involve themselves in political action. Long hours at work and getting to and from work and

private entertainment (such as watching television or surfing the Net) have dramatically reduced the time available for building and sustaining engaged communities.

Studies have shown that women who work full time are 16 percent less likely to volunteer than their part-time counterparts.

Why is community engagement important? Our personal well-being depends a great deal on the quality of our social networks—the relationships that exist among individuals and between various groups. According to sociologist Robert Wuthnow, these changes have caused "neighborhood-mindedness" to be replaced by looser, more transient relationships. This loss of community connection has physical and psychological effects: we lose our connection with the place we call home, which can lead to social and emotional isolation.

Many communities have a history of voluntary associations comprised of individuals who come together with the intention of achieving a goal or performing a service. Examples include bowling leagues, social clubs, civic organizations like the Elks, Rotary, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Many perform civic work as part of their mission. Advocacy and politically oriented groups are also part of this mix.

But membership in civic organizations has steadily diminished over the past 50 years. As noted by political scientist Robert Putnam, there has been a 58 percent drop in people attending club meetings since the 1960s. For example, the National Federation of Women's Clubs has lost 59 percent of its members since 1964 and the League of Women Voters has experienced a 42 percent reduction since 1969.

The decline of these groups is associated with a loss of "social capital." Putnam defines social capital as the interplay of social networks and norms of reciprocity and trust, which results in a wide array of economic, educational, and health benefits, and less crime, among other advantages.

There are two kinds of social capital: bonding (socializing with others very much like yourself) and bridging (connecting with people who are different). For example, while in our increasingly diverse society communitywide civic organizations have declined, personal support groups or clubs focused on shared recreational or professional interest are thriving.

In the past the most homogeneous communities were also richest in social capital. Putnam anticipates that as we become more skilled with building bridges across differences, communities richer in diversity will also become rich in social capital.

A Changing Society

Now more than ever, Americans are a diverse people. The 2010 census data show that just over one-third of the population reported their race and ethnicity as something other than non-Hispanic white. In this country diversity is often understood as the historically influenced divisions between whites, blacks, and Hispanics. Immigration, which has always been part of the American experience, is another source of diversity. Religious differences have also become a source of mistrust for some people. Research shows diverse communities have more difficulty than homogeneous ones when it comes to working together.

Mass media, including increasingly privatized and targeted forms of entertainment, such as direct access television, video, and social media also negatively impact community life. Individuals spend more time alone in front of the computer. Increasingly specialized forms of delivery, including cable channels and direct video, target increasingly narrow markets. People who watch an average of 23 hours a week are significantly less likely to engage in volunteer activities. As the authors of a Corporation for Community and National Service report note, "This adds another nail to the coffin on the corrosive impact of commercial entertainment television on civic engagement." The result? Whether virtually or physically, people have fewer shared experiences.

More recently, online social media has transformed how we communicate with each other. And generational differences, more distinct now than at any time since the 1960s, are in large part a consequence of rapidly changing technologies. It often seems as though young people are inhabiting a world that is different not only from their parents' world but even from the world occupied by those just a decade older.

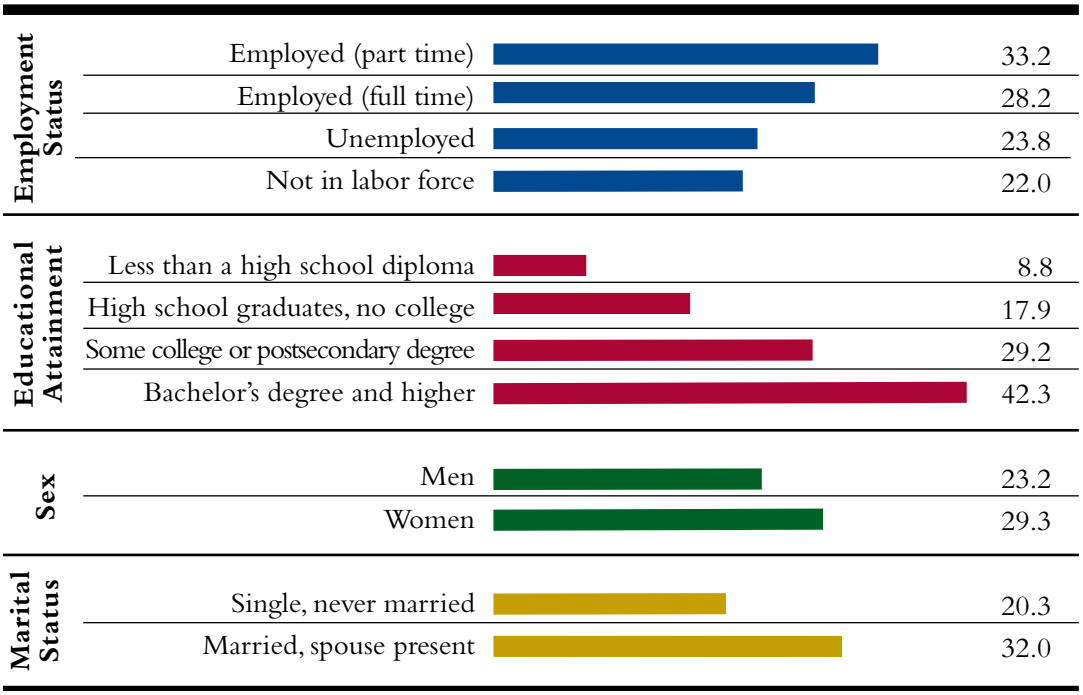
Our perceptions of others are strongly influenced by what we see on television or read on the Internet or in newspapers. The media often present sensationalized or stereotypical portrayals of those whose life experiences differ from the mainstream. This may foster a tendency to "circle the wagons." For community organizations where social activities and friendships are important, new members whose life experiences match those currently involved in the organization are recruited. Those with differing economic, ethnic, generational, racial, regional, or religious life experiences may be intentionally or unconsciously excluded. It may also result in a proliferation of groups and organizations that are isolated from each other in spite of shared goals or geographic proximity.

A Framework for Deliberation

Changing economic conditions and technological innovations, including the ever-increasing pervasiveness of mass

Volunteer Rates by Selected Characteristics

Percentage of the US population that volunteered at least once through or for an organization between September 2009 and September 2010



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

and social media, have transformed our personal lives and our communities. This has affected how families interact, how and where we work, and how we form and maintain relationships, both public and private. Today individuals may bond more strongly with an online community or colleagues at work than with their neighbors. The blurring of distinctions between work and home, made possible by technology, consumes time once spent on social and civic pursuits. Public spaces and even our own neighborhoods don't seem as safe as they used to be. And a lack of trust in others makes bridging differences between those with differing social, political, religious, or cultural beliefs and experiences more challenging.

What we need to deliberate about is this: how can we create engaged communities in a time of such rapid change?

The response to this challenge isn't clear. Some believe we should embrace technology and recognize the value of differences. Others believe we should reaffirm the value of personal connections and recognize that communities exist in physical places that must be welcoming and safe. A third possibility is to focus on addressing the social and economic issues that limit individual success or civic participation.

Option 1 asserts that we need to use new technologies as tools for civic renewal. In addition, we need to rebuild our trust in each other and reject stereotypes instilled by mass media. In this time of increasing diversity, we have to find ways of accepting and affirming generational and cultural differences.

The trade-off *is that changes in the longstanding character of many civic organizations may be difficult for more traditional members to accept.* This option may also lead to more superficial relationships. People barely have enough time for family and current friends, so they may not want to connect with people who don't share their interests and values.

Option 2 is based on the belief that human beings need to see, hear, and even touch each other in order to bond. If people are to interact with each other, our communities have to be safe and pedestrian-friendly. Finally, since a sense of place also includes shared history, arts, and culture, educational, historical, and arts organizations all have an important role to play.

The trade-off *is that this may actually increase fragmentation by appealing to personal and localized interests rather than building bridges across differences.* Efforts to make communities safer may lead to abuse of community policing or neighborhood watch efforts. Focusing on social connections may divert attention and resources away from poverty, inadequate schools, or public health problems.

Option 3 calls for addressing the social and economic issues that limit people's civic participation. We need to recognize the many ways in which people contribute to the common good. Even if individuals don't have the time to become involved, they may be willing to contribute their expertise or write a check for a cause they support on a case-by-case basis.

The trade-off *is that this may result in focusing on economic issues and personal professional development instead of a more integrated approach to community life.* It may increase partnerships between civic organizations, businesses, and government, but at the cost of blurring the differences between public and private interests. Focusing on financial security may transform community service into yet another activity that prioritizes self-interest.

OPTION 1

Embrace Change and Affirm Differences

In 2010, Billy Lucas, a 15-year-old Indiana high school student, committed suicide after being taunted by his classmates for being gay. (As with many other victims of anti-gay bullying, Lucas may or may not have been gay.) In an MTV interview, syndicated columnist Dan Savage lamented, "I wish I could've talked to this kid for five minutes, so I could've told him it gets better." Then he realized it wasn't too late to reach thousands of other teenagers.

Savage and his partner Terry Miller made a video about how they each had been bullied in high school and emphasized how they had grown up to live happy lives. They posted it on the video-sharing site, YouTube, and encouraged other gay, bisexual, and transgender adults to do the same. The It Gets Better project is now a worldwide movement with more than 50,000 user-created videos that have been viewed more than 50 million times. Contributors now include celebrities, politicians, and organizations, including President Barack Obama, and employees from The Gap, Google, Facebook, and Pixar.

According to Option 1, building and sustaining engaged communities requires us to adapt to cultural and technological change in just this kind of way. Americans have always been pioneers, embracing the unknown. We need to use new technologies to unite rather than divide us. Facebook, Twitter, and texting should not be limited to maintaining connec-

tions with family and friends, but also as tools for civic renewal. In addition we need to rebuild our trust in each other and reject stereotypes instilled by mass media. Also, in this time of increasing diversity, we have to find ways of accepting and affirming generational and cultural differences.

Adapt to Generational and Technological Change

Millennials, those born after 1980, and children of the digital age, could also be called the "always connected" generation. They are immersed in social media. Eighty-three percent sleep with their cell phones, and rely on them for texts, phone calls, and e-mails, songs, news, videos, and games. Only 50 percent of Baby Boomers, and 20 percent of the Silent Generation have cell phones by their beds. Three-quarters of those under 30 have their profiles on social networks. Virtual communities whose members may never meet in person continue to proliferate

As a society we rely heavily on electronic media not only for personal communication and entertainment, but also to advance social and political causes. Technology provides avenues for education and mentoring in ways that were simply not possible even a decade ago. As demonstrated by the It Gets Better project, social media can be used to provide support not available in local communities for those subject to discrimination, harassment, or political persecution.

A Pew Charitable Trusts study found that one in five Americans uses digital tools to communicate with neighbors and monitor community developments. Today many people under 65 participate in civic and political activities through signing and forwarding e-mail petitions, "checkbook memberships," and becoming active in short-lived coalitions. While some of these acts are performed alone in front of a computer screen, the issues often are discussed with others at work or school.

According to this option, the Internet is an invaluable tool for those interested in building social capital. Communities in the future will be located not only in particular places but also in virtual spaces. "Electronic welcome mats" are an interesting example of how the Internet can be used for mobilizing community action. These are web pages developed to share information about an organization's mission and assist with fundraising and "friend raising." They can also be used to organize community activities. In an initiative that blended civic and recreational interests, a successful protest against attempts to close dog parks was organized by the New York Chihuahua Club's online group. The Chihuahua Club's website also assists members who have moved to other parts of the country to connect with a chapter in their new hometown. Millennials want to respond quickly to what interests them. Reaching out to the virtual communities inhabited by Millennials can provide energy and vital connections for more formally organized and often hierarchical civic organizations.

While this option holds that we need to embrace such new tools of engagement, we also need to ensure that these new forms of communication don't lead to increasing social fragmentation. When individuals use technology to connect only with family and friends the result is virtually isolated social enclaves. Organizations need to figure out how social media can be used to establish appealing sites for reaching out to potential new members and diverse audiences. And, according to this option, everyone, regardless of age or wealth, should have the opportunity to learn how to use these new forms of communication and have access to high-speed Internet.

Rebuild Trust

In contrast to trust based on interpersonal relationships, social trust includes trusting people in general. In the 1960s, 55 percent of all Americans trusted strangers; by 1999 that number was down to 34 percent. In 2010, two-thirds of Millennials agreed that "you can't be too careful" when dealing with people you don't know. Researchers have found that while diversity reduces trust, direct contact with members of other social or racial groups has positive effects.

A study conducted by Dietlind Stolle and Laura Nishikawa found that more than 90 percent of parents teach their children to distrust strangers. This is true not only for parents who lack trust themselves, but also for 20 percent of "generally trusting" and 71 percent of "mixed-trusting" parents. Only 5 percent of parents transmit trusting values to their children. There's

Millennials Outpace Older Americans in Technology Use (2010)

	Millenial (18-29)	Gen-X (30-45)	Boomer (46-64)	Silent 65+
Internet behaviors	%	%	%	%
Created social networking profile	75	50	30	6
Wireless Internet away from home	62	48	35	11
Posted video of themselves online	20	6	2	1
Use Twitter	14	10	6	1
Cell phone and texting				
Use cell to text	88	77	51	9
Texted in past 24 hours	80	63	35	4
Texted while driving	64	46	21	1
Have a cell phone/no landline	41	24	13	5
Median # texts in past 24 hours	20	12	5	—

Note: Median number of texts is based on those who texted in past 24 hours.

Source: PEW Reseach Center

also been a 13 percent drop in people who trust the press, an 8 percent drop in education, and a 10 percent drop in trust in organized religion.

Stolle and Nishikawa note that this phenomenon results in "little help between strangers, a lack of cooperation . . . between unknown people, and, as a result, the inability to overcome collective action problems. Fear of strangers and trust do not go well together."

Accept and Affirm Social and Cultural Differences

There has been more immigration since 1970 than at any time since the 1920s. According to 2012 US Census figures, 20 percent of people living in the United States speak a language other than English at home. Increased sensitivity to the customs, perceptions, and beliefs of others can help increase understanding. Becoming more familiar with other cultures and interacting socially at school functions and neighborhood events can be a first step.

Exposure to individuals whose experiences and beliefs differ from our own can make us feel uncomfortable. Different groups respond differently to the challenges posed by diversity. Only 39 percent of non-Hispanic whites over 30 believe "most people can be trusted." Other groups are even more unwilling, according to Robert Putnam's research. Only 6 percent of African Americans and 18 percent of Hispanics are trustful of people they don't know. As Putnam has noted, ethnic and racial neighborhood diversity exert a negative effect on social capital. Therefore, individuals and groups interested in civic renewal need to take on the challenge of building bridges across these differences.

Distrust arising from differences can be reduced through regular interactions with other people. One study on neighborhood diversity concluded, "Actual contact with diverse others makes racial and ethnic differences less threatening to majorities. . . . It is clear that the strength and nature of social ties may be critical to the way in which individuals react to diverse surroundings."

Many civic activities are connected to church and school. Instead of increasing insularity, these civic strongholds can work to provide a foundation for building bridges to connect with other groups. In particular, initiatives that increase knowledge of different cultures and enhance interfaith understanding will help rebuild the trusting relationships essential for robust community life.

Many civic organizations ought to work harder to branch out. In his study of voluntary associations, political scientist Scott Walker has discovered that civic organizations tend to direct invitations toward people with higher levels of income, education, and civic and political skills. Community groups should work to ensure all residents are welcomed, not only the highly educated and economically secure.

Trade-offs to this option

While the risk of teaching children to trust strangers may be small, it still exists. Also in a society where so many people do not have enough time to be with family and friends as much as they would like, it's unlikely that they will choose to spend time and effort socializing with people with whom they have little in common.

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Strengthen and Renew Traditional Ways of Connecting

Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair Jr., Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond, the four young college students who sat down together at a Woolworth's lunch counter in 1960, were close friends. They all lived in the same dorm and three had been friends since high school. When Ezell Blair worked up the courage to sit down on a stool that had up until that moment been exclusively reserved for white customers and asked for a cup of coffee, it was in part because he was flanked by his roommate and two other good friends.

A study conducted by Stanford sociologist Doug McAdam explored why some people remained active in the Civil Rights Movement after travelling to Mississippi during "Freedom Summer" while others dropped out. The difference, he discovered, was not based on a commitment to ideals but rather on the depth of their personal relationships with other activists. Those who stayed involved had more close friends who were also part of the movement.

These strong ties can be contrasted with the weak ties generated by online social media today. Journalist Malcolm Gladwell notes, "You can have a thousand 'friends' on Facebook, as you never could in real life." Furthermore, these are two very different kinds of relationships. He goes on to say, "Social networks are effective at increasing participation—by lessening the level of motivation that participation requires." For example, the

Save Darfur Coalition Facebook page has more than one million members, but the donations only average out to nine cents apiece.

Option 2 is based on the belief that human beings need to see, hear, and even touch in order to form lasting bonds with one another and with their communities. New social media can introduce new ideas, foster innovation, and increase motivation to become engaged, but they don't create the sustained commitment or build the relationships necessary for addressing complex social problems.

Public Spaces Must Be Safe and Welcoming to All

Even the casual interactions at local businesses, parks, schools, and post offices provide building blocks for social capital. However, for these to occur, people must feel that their neighborhoods are safe and pleasant. This may mean paying for additional public lighting and working in partnership with law enforcement to develop community-policing initiatives. This approach to law enforcement usually involves assigning officers to given areas so that they can become familiar with the neighborhood and with the people who inhabit it. It also requires a problem-solving approach rather than one in which police respond to crimes already committed. The drawback is that this is more time consuming and expensive than traditional police work. Community police officers also have to deal with pressure from some residents to arrest or drive away loiterers or groups of young people even if they are breaking no laws.

According to this option, communities need to create environments that encourage pedestrian traffic, which will help make public spaces more pleasant and accessible. While many neighborhood parks are designed to attract adults and younger children, the needs of teenagers are often ignored. Skateboard parks and community centers where teens can come together to socialize, listen to music, and play video games will send the message that teens are valued community members. Local officials and clubs could work together to create public spaces with activities designed to target specific ages or offer opportunities for people of different generations to interact. Civic and social groups could also do more to attract younger members through junior chapters or sponsoring activities and service projects that appeal to teens and young adults.

Place Is More than Geography

Place isn't limited to a geographic location but can also include shared history, arts, and culture. Extraordinary events can also build a shared sense of identity and commitment. Some social scientists believe the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, may have had the same effect as World War II, creating a generation more politically and civically committed than their parents were.

Educational, historical, and arts organizations all have an important role to play in building and sustaining our sense of place. Individuals should make an effort to learn about their community's social and natural history, and local historical and cultural organizations need to make connections between their particular area of interest and broader civic concerns. They should also reach out to everyone. Too often these organizations are perceived as serving only those who are well educated and more economically secure.

This option also holds that the visual and performing arts can create ways of engaging the public in issues related to social justice, inclusiveness, community building, and environmental issues. Possible partners can include local businesses, community and cultural organizations, and government agencies. Public participatory art projects (where artists and residents work together to explore a local issue through creation of a mural or a site-specific sculpture) storytelling, musical events, and digital histories are some examples of what might serve the purpose. The Art and Soul project in Starksboro, Vermont, explored issues

Jim Parkin/Shutterstock.com

Community policing usually involves assigning officers to given areas so they can become familiar with the neighborhood and with the people who inhabit it.

involving "integrating newcomers and old-timers, commuters and farmers." Conflicts concerning rapid growth, rural lifestyle, rising real-estate prices, and limited economic opportunities were all addressed. Using digital storytelling, artistic collaboration, and community events, residents engaged in discussions about what they value and developed actions for addressing the problems at hand. Other activities associated with the project included "Slow, Children" road sign design, cross-generational collage and sculpture, school programs, and weekly landscape painting sessions.

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Voluntary organizations might learn from megachurches, which have attracted thousands of new members by redesigning their buldings and services to appeal to the particular interests of potential congregants.

Build Relationship-Rich Organizations

Today, churches and schools are the most popular volunteer sites. Not coincidentally, they are places where people regularly spend time together and come to know and trust each other. This suggests that relationships may be richer in settings where people share a specific belief or common interest than in the community-at-large.

In spite of the decline in traditional church membership, the *Economist* reports megachurches (institutions with an average congregation of more than 2,000 each weekend) have grown from fewer than 10 in 1960 to more than 1,200 today. These churches have attracted new members by redesigning their buildings and services to appeal to the interests of potential congregants. "Out went 200-year-old hymns, pulpits and even church-like buildings. In came information booths, food courts, churches that look like schools, reggae services and sermons with Powerpoint presentations." The *Economist* notes, "If megachurches can win millions of new supporters by lowering barriers to entry, there is no reason why secular civic organizations cannot do the same."

Voluntary organizations and clubs might learn a lesson from these churches by thinking about how to appeal to prospective members. Are the organization's traditional customs and practices inadvertently driving away new members? Is the organization welcoming to a diversity of educational levels, ages, religious beliefs, cultures, and incomes? Are new members unintentionally made to feel as if they don't fit in? These are the questions organizations ought to ask themselves.

Voluntary associations that operate at regional or national levels need to examine the quality of their relationships with local chapters. Bureaucracy and professionalization may be necessary to maintain a complex organization, but staying in touch with, and understanding, the needs and interests of grassroots members is critical. Just as with businesses, it is easy to develop a distinct culture at the national headquarters that results in alienation at local branches. The megachurches managed this problem by developing small groups designed to break up the congregation, ensure face-to-face interaction, and appeal to the particular interests of individuals, such as computer enthusiasts, cyclists, and knitters. In many ways these groups resemble the traditional chapters of voluntary organizations.

Trade-offs to this option

Many people now live in ways that are quite different from the way we lived even 5o years ago. Few may really have the time to connect with neighbors whom they may barely know. In difficult economic times, cash-strapped towns and cities may not have the revenue to spare for community policing, cultural and artistic programs, or amenities that go into making public spaces attractive. Some may see this as a "feel good" approach that diverts resources from critical problems like public health, crime, or poverty.

OPTION 3

Meet People Where They Are

As with many people, Ellie Towne's routine consisted of getting up, going to work during the day, spending the evening at home, and going to bed. But, she explains, "When I retired, I realized what was going on in the community. That's when I said, 'I've got to do something about it.'" Towne lives in Flowing Wells, a neighborhood in Tuscon, Arizona, where about 75 percent of the residents live in trailers.

Disturbed by the number of drug-related crimes that occurred in the neighborhood, Towne joined the Flowing Wells Neighborhood Association and Community Coalition. She worked with the sheriff's department and other volunteers to close down methamphetamine labs and paint out graffiti. Towne and 290 other volunteers removed 216 tons of garbage from a 3-square-mile area. They lobbied for better lighting and flood control. However, as dedicated as Ellie Towne is, she could not have done it alone. The renewal involved many individuals and partnerships with civic groups and governmental agencies.

Today, instead of looking out over a neglected field and "people racing around in their vehicles [and] drug activity," Towne sees a park with spaces designed for T-ball, basketball, volleyball, horseshoes, and baseball; two "tot lots"; picnic

tables; and a walking path around the perimeter. Flowing Wells also has a new community center (named after Towne) and a health center. Residents have attracted a grocery store, a library, and a bank, and are working to attract more businesses.

Self-reliance and self-interest have always been hallmarks of American life. As demonstrated by what happened in Flowing Wells, people's first priority is often to take care of their own physical and economic security. Personal preferences, stage of life, generation, and culture also influence people's decisions about how and when to engage. Even Ellie Towne, who now devotes so much of her time to the community, did not do so until after her retirement. Those committed to civic engagement need to acknowledge and respect other choices and develop strategies for connecting with the needs and interests of all residents. There is no gold standard for measuring social responsibility.

Personal Economic Security and Community Connections

For those who are barely making ends meet, financial challenges affect how individuals engage with their communities. Economic status often determines group membership, with little mixing across differing income strata. For those whose financial situation is precarious, painful decisions often need to be made. For example, should limited financial resources be used to help struggling friends and relatives or be saved for a child's education? And although a young person may have a loving family and a supportive community, if she doesn't have money for tuition, she will not be able to go to college. Working overtime or holding down two jobs may mean there is no time for volunteering or joining a community organization. But, according to this option, civic-minded organizations can attract volunteers through providing internships and activities that both further their mission and provide opportunities for individuals to develop professional skills.

Sixty-two percent of Millennials say a high-paying career is among their most important goals. In a report prepared by the National Conference on Citizenship, 59 percent of volunteers in national service programs thought their contributions would benefit them personally by improving their work skills and helping them make connections that could lead to jobs. In order to have fully integrated networks, instead of groups isolated by differing economic classes or age, anyone interested in strengthening community life has to include economic well-being in the mix.

Strengthen Connections between Different Social Networks

Our increasingly time-hungry, fitness-oriented, and mobile society fosters the creation of small, informal, and sometimes short-lived social groups based on professional, recreational, and social interests. Focusing exclusively on more formally organized, civically oriented groups overlooks the opportunities for bridging and bonding offered by an array of other networks focused on personal and professional interests.

Ann Brookman, a social anthropologist, believes that Putnam and others concerned about the decline of social capital overlooked the value of the networks created around family-based activities. Many of these activities, typically organized by women, are generators of social capital. For example, many working families help each other, especially in the area of child care. Other informal ways of being connected include rotating schedules of driving children to school and babysitting rings. According to this option, we shouldn't underestimate the value of tapping into these networks or the contributions they make to building engaged communities.

Many family activities are now centered on sports. While membership in traditional civic organizations and clubs is declining, organized recreational activities are on the rise. In an essay entitled "New Ways of Bowling Together," sociologist Peter Hart-Brinson observes that civic recreation appears to be replacing Lions Clubs and PTAs as a preferred way of getting involved in public life. He goes on to note that the fitness boom "breathed new life into an old civic form—not because it is an efficient way to raise money, but because it resonates with the cultural value of hard labor and with narratives of suffering for a noble cause." He concludes, "There may be fewer people in bowling leagues today, but bowlers might be raising more money for charity than ever before."

Rather than declaring that social capital is in decline and trying to restore its traditional forms, this option holds that we should seek out ways of connecting with these vital, new areas of community life and consider what more traditonal organizations can do to emulate them.

Overlapping Spheres

Civic associations might follow the lead of professional organizations, which have become significantly more engaged in the community since the 1960s. Civic organizations should develop programs and internships that link people's professional interests with community work. Civic organizations also need to do more to structure volunteer work and internships that clearly connect with the development of professional skills. Civic, social, and fraternal organizations could partner with professional associations, local businesses, high schools, and colleges to design internship and volunteer programs. This could also lead to a growth in memberships, which have declined even as those in professional organizations have steadily increased.

In order to reenergize longstanding members and attract new ones, tradition-

al civic groups could develop programs that transform joiners in to activists by holding discussions about pressing social and economic issues.

Informal Networks Can Build Bridges

According to a Pew Charitable Trusts study, the shift to informal networks can be traced back to the Baby Boomers. Their children, Generation X, see themselves as loners and savvy entrepreneurs who often make decisions based on pragmatic concerns. Their children, the Millennials, lack a strong sense of group membership and make decisions based on personal preferences. The trend for local chapters to drop their affiliation with the national Parent Teacher Association is one example of this generational shift. In addition, many membership groups are less interested in national or even state issues, and often prefer to focus on what is happening in their local communities.

Civic organizations can respond to this shift by reaching out to individuals willing to contribute their expertise or write a check for a cause they support on a case-by-case basis. Instead of focusing solely on attracting new members, organizations could develop resource lists based on personal interests, skills, and knowledge in order to reach out to individuals who are not "joiners" but would be glad to occasionally contribute or volunteer their knowledge and skills.

Emphasizing autonomy and self-expression doesn't mean social responsibility will inevitably decline. Daily lifestyle choices are now associated with political meaning for many people. This may include eating local foods, recycling, and engaging in "political consumerism," such as "buycotts" and boycotts. ("Buycotts" are organized campaigns to buy goods or services provided by a company whose social or political values align with one's own.) In the Pew study about 35 percent of those under 65 participate in boycotts, and between 24-30 percent participate in buycotts.

Respond to the Needs of Working Women

Women have long been the mainstay of neighborhood social networks and community organizations. The Harvard Kennedy School of Government found that since 1960 a third of American women have moved from doing unpaid labor devoted to their homes and communities to the paid workforce. Yet they continue to do much of the work related to caring for home and family. In spite of the reduction in female volunteering, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics data indicate women volunteers still outnumber men (29.3 to 22.9 percent).

Ann Brookman has described the disproportionate amount of work done by women both at home and in the community as a "stalled gender revolution." More consideration needs to be given to what working women need in order to be connected and active in their communities. For a start, personal and cultural expectations about how much time men spend caring for home and family needs to be reconsidered. Community organizations should be sure to schedule activities at times that work for dual-income families. Child care should be offered at all functions or, better yet, whenever possible activities should be designed for the entire family. Finally, women who are already part of informal neighborhood networks or more formally organized civic groups might consciously work to make these more welcoming to men.

Trade-offs to this option

While many of the actions described here could attract more people to traditional civic organizations and activities, this could also result in a shift in emphasis from the public good to private interests. Focusing too much on the pleasurable aspects of community life could direct attention away from crucial problems which require hard work and compromise and yield much less pleasure.

Bridging and Bonding

How Can We Create Engaged Communities in a Time of Rapid Change?

Changing economic conditions and technological innovations, including the ever-increasing pervasiveness of mass and social media, have transformed our personal lives and our communities. This has affected how families interact, how and where we work, and how we form and maintain relationships, both public and private. Today individuals may bond more strongly with an online community or colleagues at work than with their neighbors. The blurring of distinctions between work and home, made possible by technology, consumes time once spent on social and civic pursuits.

Public spaces and even our own neighborhoods don't seem as safe as they used to be. Due in part to historically influenced divisions between whites, blacks, and Hispanics; immigration; and the tragic events of 9/11, a lack of trust makes bridging differences between those with differing social, political, religious, or cultural beliefs and experiences more challenging. How can we build and sustain engaged communities in this time of rapid change?

OPTION 1

Embrace Change and Affirm Differences

The pace of change has accelerated and too many people use new technologies for purely private reasons. This has resulted in social fragmentation. But efforts to resist change are futile—and go against the grain. Americans have always been pioneers, embracing the unknown. We need to use new technologies to unite rather than to divide us. Facebook, Twitter, and texting should not be limited to maintaining connections with family and friends, but as tools for civic renewal. In addition we need to rebuild our trust in each other and reject stereotypes instilled by mass media. Furthermore, in this time of increasing diversity, we have to find ways of accepting and affirming generational and cultural differences.

Some Examples of What Might Be Done	Consequences and Trade-Offs to Consider
Libraries and schools, should offer training and access to the Internet, to make new technologies accessible to everyone.	These public and civic resources may be primarily used for purely personal and recreational pursuits.
Civic organizations should invest in and use new social media as their primary means of communicating.	This may lead to more superficial relationships and may be hard for more traditional members to accept.
Families should teach their children to trust other people and resist being manipulated by sensational news stories.	We will have to accept the risk that our children may be harmed by predators, either online or in our communities.
Individuals and social groups should focus more on reaching out to everyone in the community. This means taking social risks and becoming more knowledgeable about other cultures.	This will create discomfort. People normally come together through shared interests and values and, as it is, barely have enough time for family and current friends.
Civic groups need to increase socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial diversity. This can be done by changing recruitment practices and developing partnerships with other organizations.	This will change the long-standing character of many organizations in ways that some members may not be prepared for or want.

OPTION 2

Strengthen and Renew Traditional Ways of Connecting

Human beings need to see, hear, and even touch each other in order to bond and develop trust. New technologies and change have diminished our opportunities to be physically present with one another, which makes it hard to establish bonds. We need to rebuild traditional organizations and extend existing networks. Since families are an integral part of community networks, civic organizations must restructure their activities to accommodate those changing lifestyles. If people are to interact with each other, our communities have to be safe and pedestrian-friendly. And finally, since a sense of place also includes shared history, arts, and culture, educational, historical, and arts organizations all have an important role to play.

Some Examples of What Might Be Done	Consequences and Trade-Offs to Consider
Civic groups and communities need to sponsor ways to bring people together, such as festivals and other recreational events.	Communities can hold more social events but those attending still may associate only with others like them, whom they already know.
Local government should invest in good lighting and community policing, form crime watch groups, and create public spaces that attract adults, teenagers, and children.	Community policing or neighborhood watch efforts may be abused by overzealous residents. More welcoming public spaces may cause people to congregate in ways that inconvenience home and business owners.
Individuals need to be more aware of unintended messages they convey and become more knowledgeable about diversity. Groups should adopt policies that make them more welcoming to new and different members.	Many may question why it is necessary for individuals and organizations to adapt to newcomers, instead of the other way around.
Educational, historical, and arts organizations should sponsor programs that foster a shared sense of identity, culture, and place.	Appealing to personal and localized interests may increase fragmentation rather than building bridges across differences.
Civic organizations should build virtual communities around personal or local interests that can lead to real-time connections between people.	Appealing to personal and localized interests may increase fragmentation rather than building bridges across differences.

OPTION 3

Meet People Where They Are

We too often look to public institutions and organizations to create a sense of community when many social needs are met in the more private realm of individual and family life. People who engage in the life of their communities do so because it appeals to their personal or professional aspirations. There are many ways for people to contribute to the common good. Internships should be structured to help people develop professional skills. While many individuals may not have the time or inclination to join a community group, if asked they may contribute their expertise or write a check for a cause they support. Civic organizations should cultivate relationships with a broad array of individuals and professional associations.

Some Examples of What Might Be Done	Consequences and Trade-Offs to Consider
Schools should develop volunteer and internship opportunities that also help individuals gain the knowledge and skills needed for employment.	This might be seen as prioritizing professional development over community service.
Individuals and civic groups should partner with political, business, and professional organizations to address social and economic problems that impact families in their communities.	This would enlarge the possibilities for partnerships, but may do so at the cost of blurring the differences between public and private interests.
Community organizations should reach out to individuals who may provide expertise or financial support on a one-time basis without any expectation that this will result in a long-term commitment.	Building community and addressing complex social issues requires networks and infrastructure. This means some have to assume long-term responsibility while others are free to come and go as they please.
State and federal governments should provide more tax incentives to reward those who share skills and time for community betterment.	Providing financial rewards for this activity will transform what was once considered a social responsibility into a personal financial gain.
High schools and colleges should not mandate community service because this is an activity that should be freely chosen by the individual.	Organizations that now rely on a steady stream of volunteers from schools will have to find other means of getting work done.