

**Community Capacity in the  
City of Huntington, West Virginia**

*Report of Survey Findings  
Collected From  
Create Huntington Project Participants*

**Prepared for**

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## Introduction

Create Huntington project participants completed a survey designed to assess their perception of local capacity in the City of Huntington. Survey responses were collected during the month of October, 2008. Participation in the survey was voluntary on the part of persons involved in the *Create Huntington* project. Although those persons serving as a Create Huntington team member for the project were encouraged to submit responses to the on-line survey, a little more than half of the survey respondents (54.1%) indicated they were a member of the “Create Huntington Team.”

The survey is designed to measure levels of capacity as perceived by survey respondents across seven different areas of influence (domains) that collectively define local community capacity. Further information about how the survey is designed and how team responses are scored is provided in the appendix.

Survey results should be useful to identify strengths and weaknesses in local capacity as those strengths and weaknesses are perceived by steering team members. Responses to the survey questions are also useful in identifying specific local issues that may be seen differently from the different individual perspectives represented on the *Create Huntington team*.

Even though the survey responses reflect the views of a limited number of Huntington residents, team members helping to guide the *Create Huntington* project are generally knowledgeable of the city of Huntington and they should have some insight into how their fellow citizens view local conditions. The survey responses can provide a local perspective of capacity based on the views of respondents that complements other indicators summarized within the statistical profile of the city of Huntington.

The perception of local capacity as reflected by survey responses is summarized for each of the seven capacity domains. A score for each of the seven domains is provided. Possible scores range from -2 to +2. Scores in the negative range tend to indicate that capacity needs to be built within that particular domain and a positive score indicates that the survey respondents believe there is capacity present within that particular domain that could possibly be tapped for local development. Higher scores indicate higher levels of capacity as perceived by survey respondents as a group.

In some cases there may not be a consensus of opinion among team members about how much capacity exists within the local area. Some team members may see local conditions related to a particular domain of capacity as positive while others on the team see the same conditions more negatively. When this is the case, the lack of consensus is noted. The variations in the way steering team members see community capacity in Huntington may reflect the different roles and experiences of the team members. Those persons involved in the *Create Huntington* project are encouraged to discuss these differences among themselves in order to better understand the individual perspectives represented by steering team members. When responses to a particular statement are nearly evenly split as to those persons that agree with the statement and those that disagree, we are left with a lack of consensus about the degree of capacity that may or may not

be present. In these cases, the most useful information derived from the survey may be the identification of differing perspectives about particular local issues that may need to be further discussed.

### **Characteristics of the Survey Respondents**

A total of 37 people submitted responses to the survey of local capacity. Not all respondents chose to respond to every statement included in the survey. Responses received for any given statement range from 31 responses to 34 responses.

Only one respondent was under 25 years of age and nearly half of the respondents (46%) were 55 years of age or older. Survey respondents are nearly equally split as to gender - 51.4% of those responding to the survey are male and 48.6 % are female.

25 of the 37 persons responding to the survey (69.4%) represented themselves as concerned citizens, 6 respondents are development professionals, 2 are elected officials, and 3 are local business owners. Collectively, survey respondents have many years of knowledge about the Huntington area. 27% of respondents have lived in Huntington for more than 40 years and over 70% of respondents have lived in Huntington more than 20 years. Survey respondents also have some experience living in other areas – nearly 90% (89.2%) report they have lived in other cities or locations outside Huntington.

## **Survey Findings Related to Domains of Community Capacity**

### ***Domain 1: Health and Well Being of Local People***

Survey responses tend to indicate that local capacity is lacking in most areas within this domain. The domain score is -0.210. This score reflects concern among survey respondents about the health and well being of Huntington residents. Overall, respondents perceive most areas of the health and well being of local people as weak. There is a strong consensus of disagreement with the statement “Most people in this community are physically fit and in good health”. A significant majority also feel that many people in the community struggle to maintain a comfortable living for themselves and their families. Team members are split on their opinions about safety issues in the community, access to early childhood development programs, and the quality of public education.

The opinions about local capacity offered by those that responded to the survey are generally consistent with the statistical data cited for this domain in the community profile.

***Recommendations:***

Local programs to encourage healthy lifestyles and physical fitness would likely build additional capacity in this domain. Other areas of health and well being should also be reviewed to determine if specific action might need to be taken to improve capacity in this area.

***Domain 2: Skills Knowledge and Abilities of Local People***

A mixed assessment of local capacity in this domain was reflected by survey responses. Overall respondents see this domain neither positively or negatively. The domain score is +0.034. This score represents an overall perception that this area is neither a significant strength nor weakness. Specific issues within this domain are seen as relative strengths including citizen access to meetings about community issues and opportunities for people to gain new skills and knowledge.

Other issues are seen more negatively. The team offered differing views about whether or not local people value life-long learning and also about the degree people are willing to help with local community projects. A significant majority of survey respondents expressed some doubt that local government makes decisions based on good information. Overall, the team sees these three areas more negatively than positively.

***Recommendations:***

Overall, this domain is an area where developing additional capacity appears to be needed. Survey responses would indicate that attention should be paid to strategies that would encourage more Huntington residents to take advantage of opportunities to learn new skills and get more involved in projects that would improve their neighborhood and community.

***Domain 3: Relationships and Interpersonal Communications***

Relationships and Communication is also an area where respondents see some strength and some weakness; however, overall this is a domain of capacity that needs to be built. The overall domain score is -0.136. Several issues related to relationships and interpersonal communications appear to need attention in Huntington based on the survey responses. Survey respondents do not generally believe people in Huntington have confidence in city officials to always act in the best interest of the community; nor do they feel people know who to contact when outside assistance is needed.

Responses generally were in agreement that local residents feel they need to “roll up their sleeves and do it themselves” if improvements are to be made; however, there was a considerable difference of opinion among respondents as to whether or not people in the community trust their neighbors to do what’s best for the common good and whether or not people are willing to listen to all points of view.

***Recommendations:***

Building additional social capital within this domain in Huntington would likely contribute to local citizens’ efforts to improve the community. Providing opportunities for people to interact and work together on neighborhood projects with city officials would be useful. The current

activity around the *Create Huntington Initiative* should produce positive results in this regard through increased citizen engagement and recruitment of local residents to work together. Neighborhood events that encourage local residents to get to know one another would likely build additional social capital as well.

#### ***Domain 4: Community Initiative, Responsibility and Adaptability***

This domain is a second key component of social capital and addresses the sense of hope in the area, involvement of people in decision making roles, and willingness to help improve the community. Survey respondents see this domain of social capital a little more positively than domain 3 but it is still an area where building additional social capital would be beneficial. The domain score is +0.120. This overall score indicates a very small level of social capital is present within this domain.

Two of the five variables addressed in the survey that influence this domain were seen positively by those Huntington residents responding to the survey. Overall, respondents appear to be aware of one or more local organizations that “get everyone to work together” but not all respondents agree that such organizations are currently in place. A majority of people completing a survey also think “lots of people volunteer their time to help with community projects”. Respondents as a whole do not think Huntington residents “look forward to the future” and also do not seem to think that a broad diversity of people serve on local boards, task forces, etc.

A majority of survey respondents agreed that “most community members are on the same page regarding what they would like to see in the community”; however, a number of people disagreed with this statement.

#### ***Recommendations:***

Additional social capital needs to be built in Huntington. Local residents working on the *Create Huntington* project would benefit from discussing issues related to social capital since there are differing opinions among the team members about several of the indicators that are addressed in the survey to assess current levels of social capital. Continuing to focus attention on strategies to further engage local citizens in planning and decision making to improve the area and planned strategies to reach out to more local citizens as plans are developed and implemented would be beneficial.

#### ***Domain 5: Cultural Diversity and Quality of Life***

Cultural diversity and quality of life is the domain where the Create Huntington team sees the highest level of current capacity. The capacity score for this domain is +0.564. All five variables contributing to this domain are viewed favorably by at least a majority of the team.

A desire to preserve local heritage, strong spiritual values, and a positive sense of place are all seen as attributes for the area and there is a consensus of opinion about these issues. Respondents also generally agree that people in Huntington have opportunities available to them to “enrich

their lives through music and the arts”. Survey responses reflect less positive views about local recreational opportunities. A majority of respondents agreed that “local people have lots of recreational opportunities” but several people disagreed with the statement.

**Recommendations:**

The cultural capital in Huntington and the quality of life should be emphasized when local plans are developed. These assets might be leveraged to attract additional development. Recreational opportunities may be an area where some additional development would be beneficial.

***Domain 6: Investments in Community and Financial Resources***

This domain is viewed positively. The domain score for this domain is +0.224 indicating a relatively small level of capacity in this domain. There was a strong consensus that local public facilities (schools, hospitals, etc) are modern and well equipped. A majority of respondents also tend to believe that a good business idea would be supported by banks in the area and that local people have opportunities to learn about starting a business.

There is less confidence expressed in the survey about Huntington being able to secure its share of federal and state resources to support local projects and a lack of confidence that local businesses generally do well in the area.

Statistical data included in the community profile for this domain generally supports the view of survey respondents about financial capital available in Huntington. Business activity is above average in the area and there appears to be financial capital available through local institutions. A concern emerging from the statistical data may be a loss of manufacturing jobs and an increase in service sector jobs over the past 40 years.

**Recommendations:**

Modern community facilities such as schools and hospitals and the entrepreneurial opportunities in the city are positives that can be built on as local plans for development proceed. The *Create Huntington* project may want to promote continued opportunities to learn about starting a business. Some type of business incubator model may be worth pursuing for the city.

***Domain 7: Sustainable, Healthy Ecosystems with Multiple Community Benefits***

This domain is perceived positively. The overall domain score for environmental capital is +0.410. The *Create Huntington* project respondents see this area much more positively than the local *Sustainable Communities Team*. Four of the five areas addressed in the survey that are related to environmental capital were seen positively by the *Create Huntington* respondents. There was a strong consensus of opinion expressed by the survey responses that people in Huntington “treasure their natural surroundings”. Most respondents also think the quality of the air and water is an important consideration for local people when planning for local development projects and a majority thinks the overall quality of the environment is really important to people

as well. Most of the survey respondents expressed the belief that people who have to move away from Huntington feel some sense of loss and want to return whenever possible.

Respondents, for the most part, did not tend to agree that “local industries engage in environmentally friendly practices”.

***Recommendations:***

Based on the survey responses there may be environmental capital that can be tapped when local plans are developed for the city. Citizens working on the *Create Huntington* project may want to discuss ways that the local environmental attributes can contribute to development within the city. The *Create Huntington* project may also want to focus some attention on environmental practices of local industries since this appears to be an area of some concern.

**Summary**

The scores assigned to each domain of capacity based on the survey responses are intended only as a way to describe the perceived level of one type of capacity as contrasted to another within the city of Huntington. By assigning a numeric score, it is easier to identify domains of capacity that are perceived as being present in the area and also identify those domains where attention needs to be paid to building additional capacity.

Based on the survey responses, persons involved with the *Create Huntington* project tend to believe the domains of capacity that can be tapped in local development projects may be found in the cultural and quality of life issues, and in areas related to environmental capital. There is also some strength expressed in the domain of investment in community and financial resources. Domains of capacity that need to be further developed in the city include human capital (health and well-being of local residents and the skills and knowledge of local people), and the domains related to social capital.

## Appendix

### Methodology for Analysis of Survey Responses

Huntington residents working on the *Create Huntington* project were asked to complete a survey in order to measure beliefs held related to 35 measures of local capacity. The capacity survey is composed of a series of 35 statements. Each of the seven domains of community capacity defined by the capacity framework (see appendix B of the Community Profile) is measured by five statements contained in the survey. Survey respondents were asked to evaluate each statement based on their personal knowledge of the larger community and choose the degree to which they agree or disagree with the 35 statements using a five point Likert-type scale. Responses for each statement can range from “strongly disagree” to strongly agree”.

Individual survey responses were analyzed to produce a composite score for each of the thirty-five variables. For purposes of analysis individual responses were scored from -2 to +2. Responses were scored as follows: “a response of strongly disagree was assigned a value of -2, disagree was valued at -1, neither agree or disagree is a neutral response and received 0 value, a response of agree was valued +1, and strongly agree was assigned a value of +2. The average of the assigned values for all respondents was then used as the score for each individual statement (variable). Finally, an average score was calculated for each of the seven domains by averaging the scores of the five variables related to each domain.

The overall score for each domain is based on the average of the score for each of the five variables. Domain scores can range from minus two (-2.0) if all respondents strongly disagree with all five statements to plus two (+2.0) if all respondents strongly agree with all five statements. For any given statement it is highly unlikely that the average response will approach either -2 or +2. In general, positive domain scores indicate capacity is present and negative scores indicate the community lacks capacity in the area defined by the domain. Higher scores are interpreted as indicative of higher levels of capacity.

The level of capacity present within the local community for each domain is only reflective of the opinion and knowledge of those persons completing the survey. Since the survey was not administered in a way that provides for a statistically valid sampling of all community residents, survey results are not necessarily reflective of all persons residing in Huntington. Levels of community capacity indicated by survey results can help to inform the more objective data available about current community conditions and help identify areas where building local capacity might be beneficial to local development efforts.