



Strengthening Human Services through Social Capital: Project Overview 2018 – 2021

Individuals who have higher levels of social capital tend to have better outcomes related to health, happiness, and employment. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has many programs that aim to help individuals and families achieve these same goals, but there is little research on how program operators and designers can more intentionally leverage and build social capital to improve participant outcomes in these areas.

This project seeks to understand how local, state, faith-based, and nonprofit human services programs and organizations can create and use social capital to increase employment, reduce poverty, and improve child and family well-being. HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) has contracted with Research Triangle Institute and the University of North Carolina School of Government for this project.

Social capital refers to **connections, networks, or relationships among people and the value that arises from them** and can be accessed or mobilized to help individuals succeed in life. It produces information, emotional or financial support, and/or other resources.

This project takes a cross-cutting look at social-capital-building programs across human services programs, target populations, and geographic areas.

Project Goals:

1. How do organizations, including faith-based, non-profit, and public agencies, in low-income communities currently build and leverage social capital to reduce poverty, increase employment, and improve child and family well-being?
2. How can human services programs and HHS policies better build and leverage social capital?

Project Approach:

1. **Expert consultations** – We are consulting with 13 experts, including researchers, practitioners, and state and federal policymakers at every stage in the project.
2. **Program Scan** – We conducted a scan of human services programs using social capital and findings from about 30 strong program examples.
3. **Case Studies** – We're doing a deeper dive to understand how some programs are helping program participants create or use social capital.
4. **Identification of Emerging Practices** – We used project learnings to identify emerging practices that other human services and faith-based agencies could use to help program participants build or leverage social capital.
5. **Site Visits** – We're visiting programs to understand how they use social capital to strengthen their programming and improve participant outcomes.

Key Products: We're developing a wide range of materials to help human services practitioners understand how they can further build and leverage social capital among individuals and families to increase employment, reduce poverty, and improve child well-being.

- **Tools for Human Services Practitioners** – We're creating and disseminating a set of tools for practitioners in any human services program to use in their day-to-day work.
- **Case Studies** – We're developing case studies on how human services programs are using social capital, including case studies on programs using peer supports to serve survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking and programs serving individuals reentering their communities from incarceration.
- **Virtual T/TA on Reentry** – We're hosting four virtual trainings on ways that reentry programs can use social capital.
- **Special Topics Briefs** – We're developing briefs on the how organizations serving incarcerated and reentering populations build social capital among their participants and how peer supports are being used to enhance the social capital of survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking and the reentry population.