

Civic Engagement as a Pathway toward Economic Opportunity:  
A Multimethod Study of Low-income Individuals

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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February 2015

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“And we learned that no one gets where they are on their own; that each of us has a community of people who are lifting us up.” – *Michelle Obama, September 2012*

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## **Abstract**

### **Civic Engagement as a Pathway toward Economic Opportunity: A Multimethod Study of Low-income Individuals**

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Heller School for  
Social Policy and Management and the Graduate Faculty of Brandeis University  
Waltham, Massachusetts

By Jodi Rose Benenson

This dissertation used a mixed methods research design to examine the immediate and long-term effects of civic engagement on the economic outcomes of low-income individuals. The study was grounded in an asset-based theoretical approach that emphasized the importance of access to social capital and human capital assets for economic opportunity. The quantitative data were drawn from the ten-year longitudinal *Making Connections* initiative (N=1,139) to examine the long-term impact of civic engagement on employment and income mobility for individuals living in low-income households across seven cities in the United States from 2002-2011. The qualitative data came from 31 semi-structured interviews with low-income individuals who were civically engaged and lived in one of the *Making Connections* cities, Providence, RI.

This study had three key findings. First, the quantitative data demonstrated that the odds of being employed increased for individuals who became civically engaged over time. One particular measure of civic engagement, giving money to family or friends over time, was associated with an increase in income. Second, qualitative data revealed that the conditions of the civic engagement experience coupled with structural factors influenced study participants' access to social and human capital more than the form of civic engagement itself. While most forms of civic engagement provided access to social

and human capital resources, the conditions and capacity of a civic organization or group influenced whether these resources became assets. Moreover, structural barriers such as discrimination, homelessness, and incarceration diminished the potential value of these social and human capital resources, influencing whether resources could be activated into assets. Third, the qualitative data showed that study participants mobilized the social and human capital assets accessed through civic engagement into employment and education opportunities, particularly when participants' civic experiences and future goals aligned with the assets accrued.

This research demonstrated that civic engagement can influence economic outcomes for low-income individuals when provided access to social and human capital assets. As the public, private, and nonprofit sectors develop policies toward economic mobility for low-income individuals, this research contributes to new knowledge about the ways civic engagement could serve as a mechanism to influence economic opportunity.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **Overview**

Economic opportunity is out of reach for a growing number of families in the United States. The percentage of low-income individuals and families in the United States is on the rise, growing from 30% to 34% between 2002 and 2012 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, income and wealth inequality in the United States is increasing, which directly influences economic opportunity and upward mobility for individuals and families (Saez, 2013; Stiglitz, 2013).

Many policies designed to improve economic outcomes for low-income individuals are short-term solutions to promote self-sufficiency instead of long-term strategies directed toward improving economic mobility. Although these policies have improved the economic conditions of several individuals and families over time, overall, short-term individualistic labor supply programs have proven inadequate to address the rising number of low-income individuals in the United States (Crain & Kalleberg, 2007). Research regularly identifies policies related to health, education, and assets as factors that influence upward economic mobility, but these factors are not always incorporated into policies aimed at improving the economic outcomes of low-income individuals. More innovative research is needed to inform long-term strategies for low-income individuals to attain economic mobility and access economic opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Low-income is defined as those at or below 200% of the federal poverty threshold.

Although civic engagement previously has not been framed as a mechanism for economic mobility, in recent years scholars and policymakers have begun to recognize that civic engagement not only provides social and economic benefits to communities, but also to the individuals participating in civic acts. An emerging body of literature suggests that civic engagement activities such as volunteering, political involvement, and philanthropic activities can help facilitate connections and develop skills that may influence participants' employment and income statuses (Corporation for National and Community Service [CNCS], 2008, 2013; National Conference on Citizenship [NCoC], 2011; Wilson, 2000, 2012). However, the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes has not been adequately examined in the context of low-income individuals, a population that participates in a variety of civic activities and could particularly benefit from economic opportunities (Bolland & McCallum, 2002; Kingsley & Hayes, 2010; McBride, Sherraden, & Pritzker, 2006; Messias, DeJong, & McLoughlin, 2005).

### **Purpose of this Research**

The purpose of this study is to examine the immediate and long-term effects of civic engagement on economic outcomes, specifically whether, how, and under what conditions civic engagement serves as a pathway toward economic opportunity for low-income individuals living in the United States. In this study, civic engagement is defined as individual or collective actions that address issues of public concern or unmet needs, and are intended to improve or influence a community (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Carpinin,

2004; Levine, 2014).<sup>2</sup> The types of civic engagement that will be explored include community organizing, education or school involvement, giving money, informal engagement, political action and advocacy, religious participation, and volunteering. Economic mobility is defined as changes in employment and income over a person's lifetime (Urahn et al., 2012), and is measured by changes in employment status and income over time.<sup>3</sup> The primary questions guiding this research include:

- To what extent does participation in civic engagement affect economic outcomes for low-income individuals over time, and in what ways do economic outcomes vary by form of civic engagement?
- How does participation in civic engagement provide access to social and human capital assets for low-income individuals?
- How does access to social and human capital assets within a civic engagement opportunity influence economic opportunities?

This study is grounded in an asset-based theoretical approach that emphasizes the importance of access to social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000) and human capital (Becker, 1964, 1993) assets for economic mobility. This approach also recognizes that access to and opportunities for civic engagement activities that build social capital and human capital assets are not equal for all, which influences one's economic outcomes.

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<sup>2</sup> This definition was derived by combining the Adler and Goggin (2005), Carpini (2004), and Levine (2014) definitions, which all define civic engagement as participation in the life of community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future. McBride et al. (2006) specify civic engagement as social or political action that has consequences for communities and the polity.

<sup>3</sup> The definition of civic engagement used in this study focuses on the *act* and *outcomes* of civic engagement, with a particular emphasis on the economic outcomes of employment and income. The act of civic engagement can be of varying types and intensities.

This study answers the three research questions through a mixed methods research design. The quantitative data draw from the ten-year longitudinal *Making Connections* initiative to examine the long-term impact of civic engagement on employment and income mobility for 1,139 low-income households across seven cities in the United States from 2002-2011. The qualitative data come from 31 semi-structured interviews with current and former low-income individuals who participated in civic engagement activities and lived in one of the *Making Connections* cities, Providence, RI.

### **Overview of Chapters**

This study is organized into seven chapters. This first chapter introduces the study and describes its purpose and scope. Chapter 2 opens with a review of the literature from the poverty policy and civic engagement fields and examines trends, traditional policy and research approaches, and new ways to examine the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes among low-income individuals. The chapter then introduces two asset-based theoretical approaches – social capital and human capital – and describes the ways participation in civic engagement may provide access to social and human capital assets and how these assets may influence economic mobility for low-income individuals. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in this study. The chapter will restate the study’s research questions and hypotheses. The research model presented in this chapter outlines the study’s three phases of inquiry, quantitative and qualitative data sources, and analysis plans. Study limitations are also discussed.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present and analyze this study’s findings, following the approach outlined in the mixed methods research design. Chapter 4 addresses the first stage of analysis by examining the effect of civic engagement on employment and



income over time. In Chapter 5, qualitative data are analyzed to assess the ways participation in civic engagement provides access to social and human capital assets for low-income individuals. Chapter 6 addresses the ways social and human capital explain the relationship between civic engagement and economic opportunities. Finally, Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the findings and implications for future research and policy.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Little is known about the ways civic engagement could serve as a pathway toward economic opportunity for low-income individuals in the United States. The aim of this research is to contribute to the small but growing body of literature and explore whether, how, and under what conditions a relationship exists between civic engagement and economic outcomes for low-income individuals. This study will make a theoretical contribution by qualitatively testing the ways social and human capital assets influence economic outcomes for low-income individuals who are civically engaged. Along with the study's theoretical potential, it offers practical value in its ability to identify recommendations at the organizational and policy levels.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **Overview**

This study is grounded in the poverty policy and civic engagement literatures, as well as two asset-based theoretical approaches. This chapter opens with a review of the literature from the poverty policy and civic engagement fields and examines trends, traditional policy and research approaches, and new ways to examine the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes among low-income individuals. The chapter then introduces two asset-based theoretical approaches – social capital and human capital – and describes the ways participation in civic engagement may provide access to social and human capital assets and how these assets may influence the economic outcomes of low-income individuals.

### **Economic Trends Among Low-income Individuals in the United States**

The percentage of low-income individuals and families in the United States has been on the rise for nearly a decade. In fact, the proportion of low-income people living in the United States has increased almost every year since 2000, with the exception of 2006 when the number decreased by .3% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Blacks, Hispanics, women, and children have rates that exceed these levels (DeNavas-Walt, et al., 2013). Not only is the low-income population growing, but for low-income households in the United States, economic mobility and opportunity has stalled.

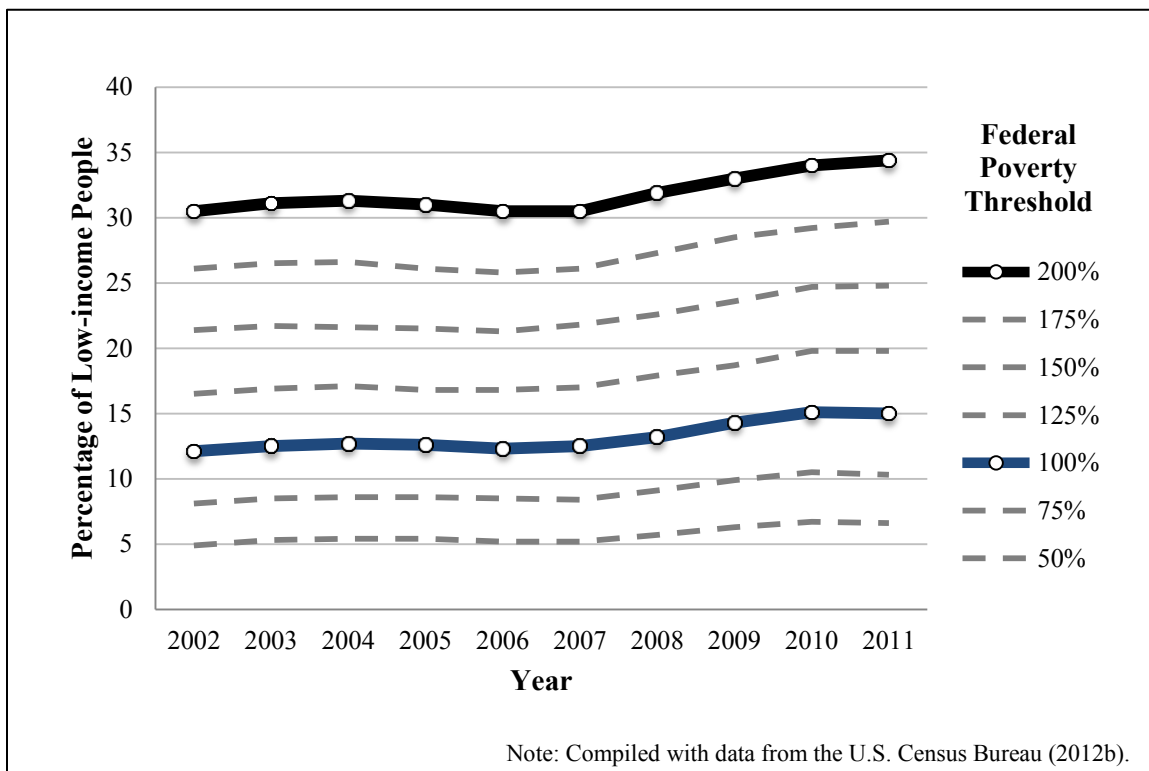
**Defining poverty and low-income.** Traditionally, individuals are considered low-income if they live in poverty, or 100% of the federal income poverty threshold, which is the definition of poverty in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). The U.S. Census Bureau determines a household's poverty status by comparing pre-tax cash income against a threshold that is set at three times the cost of a minimum food diet in 1963, updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index, and adjusted for family size, composition, and age of householder. "Family" is defined as persons living together who are related either by blood or marriage, and thresholds do not vary geographically (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2013).<sup>4</sup>

Despite the federal definition of poverty, scholars and policymakers regularly view income above this federal definition but at or below two times this threshold as the minimum income that individuals need to meet their basic needs (Iversen & Armstrong, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). While not official, others assess income adequacy in terms of a supplemental measure of poverty, which takes into account medical, commuting, and other living costs. This measure was created to better reflect contemporary social and economic realities and government policy, such as geographic differences in housing costs (Short, 2012). Other ancillary measures have also been created to better understand the level and trend of poverty in different regions (Johnson & Smeeding, 2012). Accordingly, because the federal poverty threshold does not capture the entire low-income population in the United States, at or below 200% of the poverty threshold is a commonly accepted measure for capturing who is low-income in the United States and will be used in this study (Short, 2012).

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<sup>4</sup> While poverty thresholds calculate official poverty statistics, poverty guidelines are a version of the thresholds used for administrative purposes, such as to determine financial eligibility for certain federal programs.

As seen in Figure 1.1, the percentage of individuals and families living at or below the federal definition of poverty (100%) grew from 12% to 15% between 2002 and 2011, and the percentage of individuals and families living at or below two times this threshold (200%) grew from 30% to 34% between these years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). In addition, 18-64 year olds made up 56% (59.4 million) of those under 200% the federal poverty threshold in 2011 (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2012). Because the 200% threshold captures a broader range of low-income individuals living in the United States who may be struggling financially (Hendey, McKernan, & Woo, 2012), it is the best definition of low-income for this study.



**Figure 1.1.** Percentage of Low-income People in Poverty in the United States at Varying Federal Poverty Thresholds

**Defining economic mobility and opportunity.** Not only is the percentage of low-income individuals growing in the United States, but for people in the lowest economic quintiles, upward economic mobility occurs less frequently than for people across other income quintiles (Urahn et al., 2012; Stiglitz, 2013).<sup>5</sup> Economic mobility is defined as movement up and down the economic ladder within a person or group over a lifetime (intra-generational) and across generations (inter-generational). Absolute mobility is a measure of how much better or worse a person is doing in absolute dollar terms than their peers, their parents, or even themselves over time. Relative mobility examines whether people are able to change their rank in the income distribution over time, regardless of how much money they earn.

Current research demonstrates that in terms of income, upward mobility among low-income individuals and households has stalled, as 43% of Americans remain at the bottom quintile, 70% remain below the middle quintile, and only 4% make it to the top quintile as adults (Urahn et al., 2012). In addition, compared to male and white counterparts, low-income women and people of color are more likely to remain in the bottom quintile than move upward (Eller, 1996; Gittleman & Joyce, 1995). For instance, while households that experienced unemployment from 1998 to 2008 had low family incomes throughout the decade, white households that experienced unemployment earned more income than fully employed black households and also had more wealth (Boguslaw et al., 2013). Thus, lower incomes are related to the likelihood of an individual or household to stay in their current quintile, particularly if the individual is a member of a marginalized group.

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<sup>5</sup> Households are often divided into quintiles according to their gross income. Each quintile represents one fifth of all households, and in 2011 the lowest fifth represented 24.2 million households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

In this study, economic mobility will be defined in terms of relative intra-generational mobility, or how much better or worse a person is doing economically over time. Mobility will be measured by the extent to which the economic outcomes of employment and income situations change over time for low-income individuals. One's economic opportunity, then, will be influenced by trends in employment and income mobility.

### **Policies to Improve Economic Outcomes for Low-income Individuals**

One reason economic mobility may be stalled for low-income individuals and households is because many policies in the United States aiming to improve the economic outcomes of low-income individuals promote short-term solutions to self-sufficiency instead of long-term policies designed for economic mobility. Self-sufficiency, or independence from public assistance, has been posed as an answer to reduce welfare dependency for low-income individuals (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997), but assumes that everyone has equal access to resources and opportunities to reach self-sufficiency without public assistance. This ideological perspective of "self-sufficiency" fails to consider structural barriers that may impede one's ability to reach self-sufficiency. This study takes the approach that it is important to understand structural barriers so they can be changed and ultimately, assist people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds move up the economic ladder. Furthermore, the notion of welfare dependency is rooted in an explanation that views poverty as a problem with individual beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors of people (Lewis, 1961, 1966a, 1966b; Murray, 1984). This perspective attributes being low income to the deficits and flawed

characteristics of people, and blames people living in poverty for their economic status (Banfield, 1974; Ryan, 1976).

Most recently, through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)'s institution of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in 1996, employment has been defined as the route to self-sufficiency.<sup>6</sup> TANF, which moves welfare recipients into the workforce, identifies four purposes: assisting needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes; reducing the dependency of needy parents by promoting preparation, work and marriage; preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).

Furthermore, TANF makes short-term cash assistance available only to those who have jobs or who are able to participate in certain government-imposed "workfare" activities that count toward a state's work participation rates, which may include on-the-job training, job skills training related to work, and in some states, community service. Community service programs were designed to improve the employability of recipients not otherwise able to obtain employment. These programs were limited to projects that served a "useful community purpose" in fields such as health, social service, environmental protection, education, urban and rural redevelopment, welfare, recreation, public facilities, public safety, and childcare. However, regulatory changes in October of 2008 (see: 45 CFR §261.2(h)) narrowed the definition of community service. The work

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<sup>6</sup> Under Aid to Families with Needed Children (AFDC), the precursor to TANF from 1935-1996, states provided cash assistance to families with children, and the federal government paid half or more of all program costs (Greenberg et al., 2000). Under TANF, states qualify for block grants, and the funding for these block grants are fixed and the amount each state receives is based on the level of federal contributions to the state for the AFDC program in 1994 (Loprest, Schmidt, & Witte, 2000). States are required to maintain their spending for welfare programs at 80% of their 1994 spending levels, with a reduction to 75% if states meet other work participation requirements.

requirement was not intended to draw on the interests, goals, and strengths of TANF recipients, but rather was seen as a temporary income-based solution to increasing skills for self-sufficiency and decreasing dependence.<sup>7</sup> Thus, when low incomes are attributed to dependence or deficiency, policy efforts will be aimed at changing the individual.<sup>8</sup>

Although labor supply policies such as TANF were designed to help low-income individuals move into the paid workforce to upgrade skills and increase motivation to work through education and training programs, the policies that accompanied the shift from welfare to work have proven inadequate to address the rising number of low-income individuals in the United States (Bartik, 2001; Crain & Kalleberg, 2007; Dunifon, 2010). In fact, the majority of former welfare participants moved into the ranks of the “working poor,” finding employment at low-wage jobs with few benefits (Katz & Stern, 2004). This finding suggests that employment and income challenges are not attributable to the individual; rather, structural social, economic, and political factors influence employment and income outcomes. For these reasons, there remains a need for labor demand policies that not only increase the quality of jobs available, but also increase wage income, opportunities for advancement, preparation for jobs through education and training,

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<sup>7</sup> Families with an adult who has received federally funded assistance for a total of five years (or less at state option) are not eligible for cash aid under the TANF program. States may extend assistance beyond 60 months to up to 20% of their caseload or elect to provide assistance to families beyond 60 months using state-only funds or Social Services Block Grant funds (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Another example is Riessman’s (1962) cultural deprivation approach to poverty argues that poor schools, bad nutrition, and other aspects of poverty handicap many of the poor, making it difficult to escape deprivation. This approach was the foundation for Head Start, a program that offsets the familial and environmental disadvantages of children who grow up in lower-income homes through intensive preschool education, health and nutrition programs, and other parental involvement initiatives. According to Katz (1989), although Reissman’s intent was to challenge the widely held notion that the “culturally deprived” child is not interested in education, to present a new “cultural” approach to teaching poor children, and to distance himself from the larger “culture of poverty” thesis, his analysis had unintended effects.



health insurance or retirement benefits, job security, and the removal of discrimination barriers (Bartik, 2001).

The existence of these structural factors suggests a need to think beyond individualistic, short-term labor supply policies to improve economic outcomes for low-income individuals and instead consider the factors that may contribute to one's upward economic mobility over time. While some of these factors may pertain to the interests and goals of the individual, other factors are likely to be structural. The role of wealth, education, health and retirement benefits, and neighborhoods have previously been highlighted as factors that influence economic mobility (Boguslaw et al., 2013; Butler, Beach, & Winfree, 2008; Shapiro, 2004; Sherraden, 1991; Urahn et al., 2012), but exploration into new research domains is needed to uncover other mechanisms that may influence upward economic mobility for low-income individuals and families. While civic engagement has not been framed as a mechanism toward economic mobility for low-income individuals, an emerging body of literature finds that involvement in civic engagement activities does, in fact, provide economic benefits for people and their communities.

### **Civic Engagement and Economic Outcomes**

In recent years, civic engagement has emerged as a focus for many social scientists and policymakers (Burns, Lehman, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). Research demonstrates that individuals and communities participate in many forms of civic engagement; nationally, nearly 27% of individuals met needs in their community through volunteering, 65% served their communities by doing favors for and helping out their neighbors, and 44% actively participated in civic groups

(CNCS, 2012). While civic engagement is known as a “hallmark of democracy” and a mechanism that “strengthens the social fabric of society,” research also reveals the relationship between civic engagement and economic benefits for communities and individuals.

At the community level, research demonstrates that strong civic infrastructures in neighborhoods, cities, and states have economic spillover effects. The strength of a local civic infrastructure, such as the availability of civically committed religious congregations, local associations, and informal venues are found to boost attachment and investment in the community and positively affect its economy (Berry, Thomson, & Portney, 1993; Irwin, Blanchard, Tolbert, Nucci, & Lyson, 2004; Putnam, 1993; Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin, 1998). For instance, Sampson (2012) documents that collective efficacy in Chicago neighborhoods can have economic and social spillover effects.<sup>9</sup> He finds that high-poverty communities with a high level of collective efficacy in 1995 experienced some of the highest decreases in poverty between 1970 and 2000 along with the highest increases in collective efficacy from 1995-2002. In addition, Grisham’s (1999) exploration of Tupelo, a poor town in Mississippi, reveals the relationship between the town’s strong civic and community infrastructure and its economic development and success.

Since the most recent economic recession that began in 2007, scholars and policymakers have been particularly interested in the effects civic engagement may have on a city’s unemployment level. The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) (2011) used Current Population Survey (CPS) data to suggest that five measures of civic

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<sup>9</sup> Collective efficacy is defined as the willingness of neighbors to intervene in situations that might threaten the well-being of others (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Thus, it is mutual trust among neighbors combined with willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good.

engagement – attending meetings, helping neighbors, registering to vote, volunteering, and voter registration – helped protect against unemployment and contribute to overall economic resilience at the state level. They found that if two cities or states faced similar economic circumstances, the one with stronger civic infrastructure weathered the recession better. In their most recent report, NCoC (2012) found that communities with stronger civic engagement suffered less from unemployment during the recent recession and that civic engagement may be a buffer or safeguard to structural unemployment.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, the number of nonprofits per capita, the degree to which nonprofits engage local residents directly, and social cohesion (i.e., frequently talking to and doing favors for neighbors, always trusting neighbors, and frequently seeing or hearing from family and friends) were related to resilience against unemployment. These findings support Sampson's (2012) work, which showed that community social processes such as collective efficacy and organizational density – and not demography or income – are doing the major work in fostering connective network structures. This finding is important because it means that a key strategy for boosting employment and weathering a recession in a community is connected to the number and type of opportunities for individuals to be engaged.

While a connection between civic engagement and economic outcomes exists at the community level, additional research suggests that participation in civic engagement may provide economic benefits at the individual level. Civic activities such as volunteering can simultaneously foster a sense of connection with the larger community and cultivate hard and soft skills that are transferable to employment-related efforts outside of the civic activity, such as writing letters, planning meetings, giving

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<sup>10</sup> Defined as unemployment resulting in changes in the composition of the economy.

presentations, and attending meetings where decisions are made (Cavendish, 2000; Frumkin & Jastrzab, 2010; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Civic engagement also facilitates connections between participants and leaders in the community, which may expose participants to information about or referrals to employment opportunities (Granovetter, 1973; Petersen, Saporta, & Seidel, 2000; Wilson, 2000). For instance, 67% of both state and national AmeriCorps<sup>11</sup> members and 70% of AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) members reported that participation in the program introduced them to job connections, increased job opportunity awareness, and helped them take advantage of job opportunities (CNCS, 2008). Research also revealed that 60% of City Year alumni credit their City Year experience with providing them the skills needed to acquire their current job (Anderson, Laguarda, & Williams, 2007). Most recently, a study by CNCS (2013) found that volunteers had a 27% higher likelihood of finding a job after being out of work than non-volunteers.

The U.S. Department of Labor (U.S. DOL) (2012) recently issued a letter recognizing that active volunteering can help expand opportunities for unemployed individuals.<sup>12</sup> This suggestion by the U.S. DOL – which cites active volunteering as a mechanism that can help develop and maintain skills, expand professional networks, and enhance resumes, all while helping communities – is significant because it demonstrates that the federal government is beginning to acknowledge that participation in active civic engagement activities may be a key strategy toward improving the economic mobility of

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<sup>11</sup> AmeriCorps is a program offered through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) that offers opportunities for adults of all ages and backgrounds to serve through a network of partnerships with local and national nonprofit groups.

<sup>12</sup> Officially called the Unemployment Insurance Program Letter 16-2. Note that the U.S. DOL explicitly suggests active volunteering. Active volunteering is generally more engaging and hands on, whereas passive volunteering is a more laid back and less active approach to volunteering.

people.<sup>13</sup> However, despite the increased awareness of the relationship between civic engagement and positive economic outcomes at the community and individual levels, this relationship has not been adequately examined in the context of low-income individuals.

### **Civic Engagement and Low-income Individuals**

Investigating the relationship between civic engagement and low-income individuals through the lens of economic mobility is an approach distinct from much existing research on the topic. Instead of recognizing that low-income individuals do participate in civic engagement activities and may experience benefits from participation, the dominant approach has been to examine the psychological and socio-demographic bases for civic engagement to better understand the variation in civic participation between low- and high-income individuals and ways to increase civic engagement for low-income individuals (Guterbock & Fries, 1997; Hodgkinson, 1995; Uslander, 2003; Verba et al., 1995; Wilson, 2005). While research that examines psychological attributes such as personality traits, motives, and values<sup>14</sup> (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1997; Hodgkinson, 1995; Wilson, 2005) and other socio-demographic attributes such as socialization (Wuthnow, 1995; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997) and political efficacy<sup>15</sup> (Abramson, 1983; Verba et al., 1995) provides insight into civic engagement, these attributes have limited applicability to understanding structurally organized disparities in civic engagement that may affect one's economic mobility. This is not to

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, the inverse is entirely possible – that socioeconomic factors have affected civic engagement – which means that the causal arrow could point either way, or could point both ways at once.

<sup>14</sup> Attitudinal variables were cited as the most frequently investigated determinant of volunteer participation from 1975-1992 (Smith, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Political efficacy is often defined as one's ability or capacity to affect political outcomes. The stronger one's sense of personal efficacy, the more likely one is to participate in politics (Abramson, 1983). Both are linked to skills and knowledge; the more one participates in politics, the stronger one's sense of political efficacy.

suggest that motives or attitudes do not play a meaningful role in civic engagement; rather, an overemphasis of individual attributes without considering the systemic and structural barriers to civic engagement may underestimate the reality of civic exclusion and implicitly suggest that individual-level deficiencies explain differences across groups. Examining the social structure of civic engagement reveals that access and opportunities to participate in civic activities advantage some groups over others, and may influence one's upward economic mobility.

Access and opportunities for civic engagement first necessitate being recruited or invited to participate. Receiving “the ask” is the strongest indicator that a person will volunteer (CNCS, 2009; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Sundeen, Raskoff, & Garcia, 2007), but recruitment opportunities are not equal (Hyman & Levine, 2008; Toppe, Kirsch, & Michel, 2002): individuals with more income (over \$75,000) are three times more likely to be asked to volunteer than individuals with incomes below \$10,000 (Hodgkinson, 1995). However, if someone is asked to or hears about an opportunity to participate, resources such as time, money, education, transportation, and other barriers may affect whether and how one can participate (McBride et al., 2006). For instance, research identifies income effects to be most important in types of civic engagement that are more demanding or require financial resources (e.g., donating money), but voting and volunteering seem less affected by income than other forms of engagement; in contrast, churches or religious activities are often considered an equalizer for social and political engagement across income levels (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995). In addition, having a “stake” in a community via assets such as a small business or a home is associated with civic engagement for low-income individuals, particularly in activities

that involve parents like the Parent Teacher Association or school fundraisers (McBride, 2003). Manturuk, Lindblad, and Quercia (2012) also found that lower-income renters who became homeowners were no more involved in neighborhood organizations prior to homeownership than renters who did not become homeowners, but involvement increased significantly after these renters became homeowners.<sup>16</sup> These examples of institutional and resource barriers demonstrate that access and opportunities for civic engagement are not equal for all, and are factors that need to be considered when examining economic mobility among low-income individuals.

The community context in which civic engagement takes place also mediates access and opportunity for participation in civic engagement. Communities with more nonprofits have higher volunteer and civic engagement rates (CNCS, 2010; Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, & Weffer-Elizondo, 2005; Swaroop & Morenoff, 2006), while economically disadvantaged neighborhoods often have insufficient infrastructure and resources to create and maintain civic associations, which results in fewer opportunities for formal participation (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Stoll, 2001; Wilson, 2012; Wuthnow, 1998) and can influence a city's economy (NCoC, 2012). Living in higher poverty areas may also tax civic engagement because of the greater stressors on individuals and families (CNCS, 2010). An unequal distribution of opportunities between disadvantaged and advantaged neighborhoods could therefore have a disproportionate impact on civic

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<sup>16</sup> Another approach to understanding the civic engagement gap is a policy-centered approach, which contrasts the society-centered explanations of civic engagement that emphasize individual socio-demographics, psychological, and other predispositions toward participation. Instead, policy-centered work emphasizes the ways in which policies (e.g., welfare policies, G.I. Bill) create feedback effects that shape political action (Campbell, 2003; Guo & Peck, 2009; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Mettler, 2002). However, this approach is outside of the scope of the study but is worth mentioning due to the innovative nature of the ways we can understand the relationship between civic engagement, low-income individuals, and social policy.

engagement activities, and therefore affect one's opportunities to receive economic benefits through civic engagement.

Each of these structural components provides important insights into the ways society-centered factors can affect participation in civic engagement for low-income individuals living in the United States. Issues surrounding access to and opportunities for participation can directly influence whether civic engagement can serve as a mechanism toward upward economic mobility for low-income individuals, and must be considered when examining this relationship.

### **Theories on Assets, Social Capital, and Human Capital**

This dissertation research is grounded in an asset-based approach that emphasizes the importance of acquiring and leveraging assets for economic mobility. Two types of non-financial assets people accrue during civic engagement are social capital and human capital. A review of the literature will frame an understanding of the ways civic engagement may build and leverage social capital and human capital. While social capital and human capital have been recognized as assets that drive economic mobility (Butler et al., 2008; Urahn et al., 2012), research has not yet linked these assets to civic engagement and economic opportunity for low-income individuals.

**Assets and economic mobility.** Assets are stocks of wealth or resources in a household, community, or other unit that sustain economic security and provide a foundation for upward mobility (Shapiro, Oliver, & Meschede, 2009; Sherraden, 1991).<sup>17</sup> Assets can be acquired, accumulated, and leveraged throughout the life course (Ford

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<sup>17</sup> *Flows* of resources (incomes) are what people receive in return for labor or as a public program transfer, most of which is spent on current consumption. *Stocks* of resources (assets) are what people accumulate and hold over time, which provide for future consumption (Ratcliffe et al., 2007).



Foundation, 2004; Moser, 2007; Sherraden, 1991) and may serve as a mechanism for the transmission of socioeconomic status (Shapiro, 2004; Sherraden, 2001). Assets encompass all potential resources in the community, including financial resources, people, connections, knowledge, institutions, and property (Moser, 2007; Page-Adams & Sherraden, 1997; Thomas & Shapiro, 2009). Asset-based policies should not be seen as replacements for current income-based welfare policies, but rather as complements to traditional social programs that emphasize short-term income transfers primarily to fulfill basic consumption needs (Gamble & Prabhakar, 2005).<sup>18</sup>

An emerging body of literature notes the relevance of non-financial assets that constitute flows of invested capital (Emery & Flora, 2006; Hulme & McKay, 2006; Hulme, Moore, Shepherd, 2001). While Sherraden's (1991) analysis focuses primarily on financial assets, he also notes the relevance of social and human capital. Moser (2007) defines the five major capital assets of "the poor" as financial, physical, natural, human, and social capital. Addressing the role of capital resources offers an important avenue for advancing scholarship on low-income individuals in the United States. While previous scholarship examines these forms of non-financial capital as determinants or factors predicting civic engagement (Putnam, 2000; Sampson & Graif, 2009; Wilson 2000, 2012), Sherraden (1991) also suggests that assets may produce positive spillover effects.<sup>19</sup> Taken together, an asset-based approach suggests that social and human capital

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<sup>18</sup> Federal and state governments have implemented financial asset-based approaches to welfare policy (e.g., Individual Development Accounts) throughout the United States to assist low-income families in building wealth (Ford Foundation, 2004; Oliver & Shapiro, 1990; Sherraden, 1991, 2001, 2009; Boshara, Cramer, & Sherraden, 2007). In addition, asset-based community development (ABCD) encourages policies that are based on the capabilities of lower-income individuals and their neighborhood institutions (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> Spillover effects in the context of assets consider the positive or negative economic externalities one may receive from asset accumulation. For instance, Sherraden (1991) hypothesized that welfare-effects may

accessed through civic engagement could indirectly influence economic outcomes for low-income individuals (Benenson & Stagg, forthcoming).

**Social Capital.** Social capital in the context of assets recognizes the value of relationships and the wide range of connections people draw from in their daily lives. These social capital assets include information that people are willing to share, the sense of solidarity or trust they may call upon, the norms of reciprocity or mutual obligation people feel toward each other, or services people are willing to perform (Portes, 2000). Social connections and relationships can, therefore, provide a stock of “capital” to be employed when needed. Contemporary scholars such as Bourdieu, Coleman, Putnam, and Lin all conceive social capital as the resources that exist in social relations, but each uses varying definitions.

Bourdieu, Coleman, and Lin all use individuals or small groups as the primary units of analysis in their respective conceptualizations of social capital, and demonstrate the benefits individuals can receive from their ties with others (Portes, 2000). Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (p. 248). According to Bourdieu, one’s social network is a result of investment strategies and exchanges aimed at establishing or reproducing relationships that can be used in the short- or long-term.<sup>20</sup> This means that individuals can accrue resources as a result of their memberships and

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occur from asset-based policies; for instance, human capital asset may help someone develop skills that could affect their employment situation.

<sup>20</sup> In the context of social capital, Bourdieu argues that social capital is never completely independent of economic or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). His work demonstrates how social capital can be used to produce or reproduce inequality (e.g., how people get to powerful positions through their social connections).

relationships in social networks. Coleman's (1988) definition of social capital includes the obligations, norms, and information available to a person from his or her network. For Coleman, particular features of social structures (e.g., schools, churches) and benefits mediated by existing features in communities (e.g., trust, obligations, norms) are important for the benefits they yield to individuals, such as providing advantages in the labor market. Lin's (2001) contribution to social capital demonstrates that people who have access to social capital resources through social networks reach higher points in the occupational ladder (Lin, Vaughn, & Ensel, 1981). He argues that four types of resources constitute social capital: information, the influence that networks have over people, the social credentials that networks can impart, and the personal reinforcements that networks provide actors. For instance, Granovetter (1973) finds that most people secure jobs through "weak ties" via acquaintances, rather than close friends or family. A more recent study found that personal and professional ties are the most important avenues to getting a job (Petersen et al., 2000). Indeed, 64% of Youth Corps members attribute their affiliation with the organization to connections that helped to obtain jobs, 77% believe their time in Youth Corps gave them advantage in looking for jobs, and 86% said Youth Corps gave them exposure to new career options (Gan et al., 2011; Price et al., 2011).

From the perspective of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Lin, civic engagement could serve as a prime activity for low-income adults to access information about employment opportunities, expand networks of weak ties, access resources via organizations, and build formal and informal connections with others to develop trust and norms of reciprocity (Moser, 2007; Isham, Kolodinsky, & Kimberly, 2006). However, one criticism of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Lin's definitions of social capital is that they take

for granted the processes from which ties arise and fail to explain *how* people accrue social capital that provides access to resources (Small, 2009).<sup>21</sup> Because both Coleman (1988) and Lin (2001) assume that actors are rational, it is possible that explanations of how people make social connections seemed irrelevant to consider. For instance, Lin would argue that people enter into social relationships strategically because they will be used in the future, while Bourdieu would suggest that regardless of how ties are formed, new ties effectively end up being an “investment” because of his belief that many actions tend to be habitual instead of purposive. While Bourdieu wrote about how people form ties and explained that networks result from these investments, what he meant by investments remains unclear (Bourdieu, 1986). Information about *how* individuals accrue social capital via civic engagement could shed light on the ways civic engagement may provide returns on a social investment.

Putnam’s (1993, 1995, 2000) work extends the social capital conversation to emphasize the collective value of social relationships. He suggests that individuals will not always bear the entire costs and benefits of social connections, but that communities also possess “stocks” of social capital (Portes, 2000, p. 3). To Putnam, “features of life” such as networks, norms, and trust facilitate social capital, which is a producer of civic engagement (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). He demonstrates that forming trust-based relationships by becoming part of an organization, club, or religious congregation comes with the expectation that one’s investment into forming relationships will be returned or reciprocated. While social capital in a community may generate civic activity, Putnam

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<sup>21</sup> Small’s (2009) study of childcare centers is one of the first to demonstrate how people acquire social capital. He finds that the practice and structure of institutions (e.g., churches, childcare centers, colleges) in which people participate routinely matter more for people rather than deliberate networking. Here, Small found that how much people gain from their connections depends substantially on institutional conditions they often do not control.

would also assert that individuals could leverage social capital assets in their communities to strengthen ties with members of the same race/ethnicity, income, or other group (bonding social capital)<sup>22</sup> or connect with others across social and economic divisions (bridging social capital) (Brisson & Usher, 2005; Gittel & Vidal, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

Although bridging ties can bring greater resources or opportunities into poorer communities (Warren, Thompson, & Saegert, 2001), bridging social capital is often much harder for individuals to create, since it requires people who may not interact otherwise to come together regularly.<sup>23</sup> This is a problem intensified in the United States by widespread racial and socioeconomic segregation in residential settings (Shapiro, 2004), and may influence access to economic opportunities, such as employment. For instance, Wilson (1996) argued that joblessness among working age men in poor, racially segregated communities results in large part from their lack of multiple and diverse weak ties to draw upon for employment information. Mouw (2003) found that Americans with better jobs are usually connected to other individuals in similar positions,<sup>24</sup> but in a study of a Swiss individuals, Franzen and Hangartner (2006) duplicated Mouw's finding that networks are not associated with higher wages, but they found other benefits: better fit with employees' skills and more successful job searches (marked by fewer interviews and less time out of work). Thus, the effect on unemployment could exist even if wages are not affected. In fact, Montgomery (1992) proposed that if people find jobs quicker because of social networks, they may settle for lower wages. Here, social capital would

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<sup>22</sup> Examples of bonding social capital among low-income individuals are seen in Edin and Lein (1997) and Stack (1964).

<sup>23</sup> Criticisms of Putnam's work have mainly focused on the lack of awareness about structural inequalities (see Ferragina, 2010; Skocpol, 1996; Skocpol, Ganz, & Munson, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> However, Mouw (2003) argues that the evidence does not support a causal explanation.

be positively correlated with employment but negatively (if weakly) associated with wages.

Although research regularly cites positive outcomes related to social capital, scholars also note its possible negative effects on mobility (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Portes & Landolt, 1996). Indeed, bonding social capital can come with negative externalities (Putnam, 2000). Examples of negative social capital include relationships that enforce illegal drug or gang activity to strengthen a bond.

**Human Capital.** Human capital reflects the assets embodied in humans and encompasses skills, competencies, and knowledge that facilitate personal, social, and economic well-being (Morgan & Duncan, 1982; Rosenbaum, 1986; Schultz, 1971). The definition also includes health, energy, vision, hope, and imagination (Beeferman, 2002; Forbes & Zampelli, 2012; Sherraden, 1991). Human capital is an asset that is accumulated over time (Schultz, 1971) and across many different venues (Becker, 1993). Becker (1993) argues that the more time an individual spends in the labor market, the higher the benefits will be to human capital.

While individuals begin acquiring human capital at birth, one also has the ability to invest in human capital through education, training, and other types of work over a lifetime (Becker, 1964, 1993; Bryant, 1990; Mincer, 1974). Becker (1993) suggests that education and training are the most important investments in human capital and can occur through formal education, family and childcare settings, workplace training, informal learning in employment, and civic engagement. Indeed, civic engagement has been found serve as an important venue for individuals to develop and leverage skills and knowledge that may relate to future employment (Long & Pask, 2005; Philanthropy for Active Civic

Engagement [PACE], 2010; Sagawa, 2013; Sagawa, Connolly, & Chao, 2008; Wilson, 2000). For instance, Day & Devlin (1998) found that volunteering increases individuals' earnings, which may suggest that civic engagement signals the presence of certain skills or abilities to future employers (Ziemek, 2006). In addition, Nylund (1999) found that Associations for Unemployed People (AUPs) can aid in moral support, help with skill development, and enhance employability. Occupational skills and knowledge must also be considered within the context of civic engagement, and civic actors must be paired with civic opportunities that match their interests, goals and motivations, and existing skillsets (CNCS, 2008, 2009).

As noted earlier in this chapter, one school of thought found in the poverty literature focuses on limited human capital as an explanation for poverty; people are poor because they *lack* education, training, job skills, or language proficiency, and this lack of human capital prevents economic mobility. Like much of the civic engagement literature, this argument associates less income with restricted opportunity, but “blames the victim” (Ryan, 1976) and attributes the lack of education, skills, or training to weakness of the individual. This study does not assert that lower income individuals lack education, training, or job skills due to their “flawed character” (Lewis, 1961, 1966a; Katz, 1989); rather, the asset-based approach used in this study recognizes that population groups face structural barriers to human capital development, such as low-wage employment or job availability (Jennings, 1999), which may influence opportunities to accrue human capital assets. The asset lens also draws from a capabilities framework that recognizes development instead of deprivation for people living in poverty (Sen, 1999).

**Social Capital and Human Capital.** Research that examines the relationship between social capital and human capital often suggests that social capital and human capital are interdependent, meaning that human capital appears to foster social capital, and social capital appears to result in human capital (Ainsworth, 2002; Crowder & South, 2003; Gezinski, 2011; Halpern, 2005; Lin, 2001). Because of the interconnectedness between asset types (Emery & Flora, 2006), civic engagement that might build one type of asset in isolation may be misleading in terms of its effect on the economic outcomes of low-income individuals (Moser, 2007). The reciprocal effects of asset accumulation are also hypothesized to flow both ways, such that relationships between assets and outcomes may simultaneously affect and interact with each other (Lerman & McKernan, 2008). Specifically, social capital and human capital may be intertwined in the context of issues related to civic engagement and economic outcomes for low-income individuals.

Research demonstrates social capital and human capital assets are often accrued as a “non-purposeful” byproduct or spillover effect of the pursuit of civic engagement.<sup>25</sup> That is, an actor may accrue social capital or human capital when the purpose of his or her action is to accomplish some other objective (Merton, 1936; Coleman, 1990). In the case of civic engagement, making a connection or learning a new skill may be a byproduct of organizing a political rally or tutoring a child. These spillover effects from generating social and human capital assets are consistent with Sherraden’s (1991) explanation of the “welfare effects” from asset-based policies.

It is also important to consider how different forms of civic engagement may affect social and human capital acquisition, as asset accumulation is a dynamic and

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<sup>25</sup> The opposite of a non-purposeful pursuit of civic engagement would be if an actor sought social and human capital as the purpose of their civic engagement. However, such is not the case, as the primary purpose of civic engagement is generally to address issues or meet needs.



context-specific process (Elmelech, 2006; Moser, 2007). For instance, while some forms of civic engagement require little interaction with people (e.g., voting) other types are more active and involve more collaborative action (e.g., community organizing) (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Jones, 2006; Putnam, 2000; Sampson, 2012). Consequently, some forms of civic engagement might provide access to different forms of social and human capital than others. According to Putnam (1993, 1995), the effects of more passive forms of civic engagement on social capital are thought to be weak or absent compared to the effects of more active types of civic engagement where individuals must interact face to face. However, Wollebaek and Selle (2002) found that active participation is not necessary for the formation of social capital, particularly if an individual has been involved with multiple organizations or participated in this passive activity for a long period of time. Therefore, a closer examination of the ways different forms of civic engagement provide access to social and human capital for low-income individuals help may explain the relationship between civic engagement and economic opportunity.

Finally, it is important to understand the conditions under which assets can be most effectively accrued in a civic engagement activity. Social and human capital assets such as making connections or learning a new skillset may depend on how people interact with others (e.g., how long they interact, how frequently, how intensely, while performing a particular activity) (Becker, 1993; Small, 2009). Indeed, social capital theory cites frequent interaction (leading to trust and norms of reciprocity), and human capital theory cites longevity in the labor market (which may strengthen or build knowledge, competencies, and skills) as important toward accruing assets. However, for low-income individuals, other barriers to asset accrual may arise. As the literature

demonstrates, issues surrounding access to (e.g., time, money, location of civic engagement activity) and opportunities for participation (e.g., recruitment, civic infrastructure in a community) may directly affect whether civic engagement can serve as a pathway toward economic opportunity for low-income individuals, and must be considered when examining this relationship.

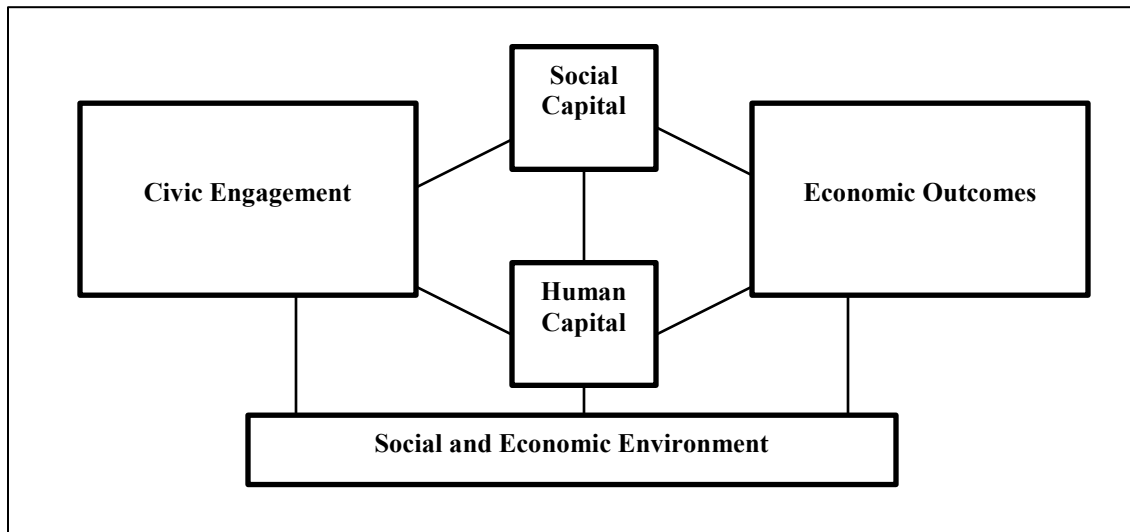
### **Summary and Conclusion**

The literature suggests a need for more innovative research to inform long-term policy strategies toward low-income individuals attaining upward economic mobility. One avenue that has not been adequately explored as a mechanism toward upward economic mobility is civic engagement. An asset-based approach to social capital and human capital suggests that civic engagement could be beneficial for upward employment and income mobility, but this research has not explicitly examined lower-income individuals in the context of civic engagement. More research is needed to understand the relationship between civic engagement and economic mobility among low-income individuals.

This study seeks to understand the immediate and long-term effects of civic engagement on economic outcomes, specifically whether, how, and under what conditions civic engagement may serve as a pathway toward economic opportunity for low-income individuals living in the United States. Figure 2.1 presents the conceptual framework for the analyses by showing the theorized relationship between the concepts in the study.

Understanding the ways civic engagement may help low-income individuals develop social and human capital assets extends the normative civic engagement

conversation and demonstrates an additional value for civic engagement that may aid in upward economic mobility.



**Figure 2.1.** Conceptual Framework

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **Overview**

This chapter outlines the study's primary research questions and describes the methods designed to best address them. The three key questions of the investigation include:

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does participation in civic engagement affect economic outcomes for low-income individuals over time, and in what ways do economic outcomes vary by form of civic engagement?

**Research Question 2:** How does participation in civic engagement provide access to social and human capital assets for low-income individuals?

**Research Question 3:** How does access to social and human capital assets within a civic engagement opportunity influence economic opportunities for low-income individuals?

This chapter will outline the mixed methods research design before results are presented in the following chapters. The chapter begins with a description of the methodological design, followed by the quantitative and qualitative data sources and analysis.

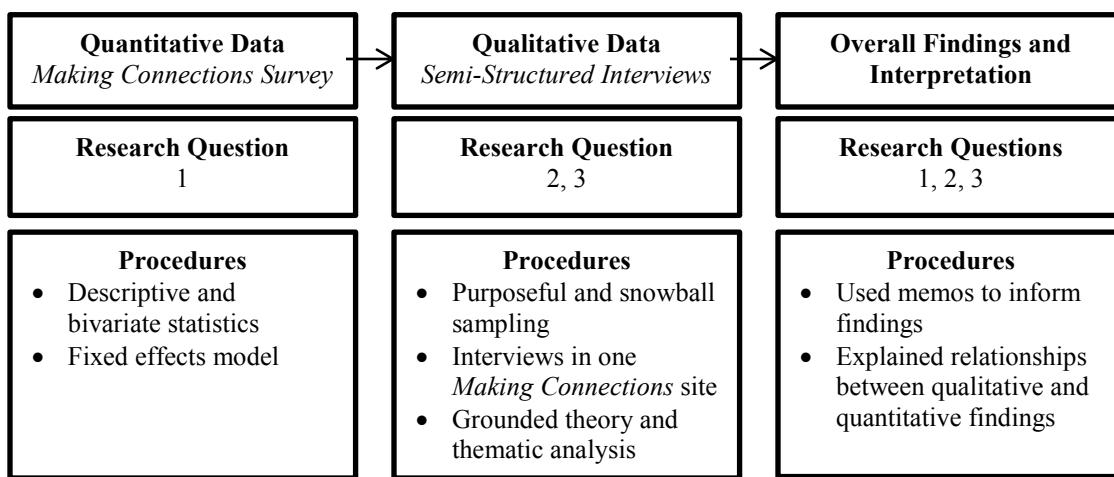
## Methodological Design

This dissertation used both quantitative and qualitative techniques. There were three purposes for using this mixed methods design: first, for the qualitative data to build upon and explain initial quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007); second, for the quantitative findings to guide purposeful sampling for the qualitative phase (Creswell et al., 2003; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989); and third, for each method to help answer different research questions (Bryman, 2006). See Figure 3.1 for a full picture of the mixed methods research design.

**Quantitative aims.** The quantitative portion of this study was designed to assess the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes of low-income households over time. Secondary data analysis of the *Making Connections* initiative offered opportunities to examine multiple forms of civic engagement on two economic outcomes over time: 1.) employment status from 2002-2011, and 2.) income status from 2005-2011. The aim of studying these outcomes was to get an understanding of whether any sort of relationship existed between participation in civic engagement and these economic outcomes. Furthermore, by looking at different forms of civic engagement, it was possible to understand whether some forms influenced economic outcomes more than others. Thus, the quantitative analysis aimed to respond to the first research question by examining the effect of participation in civic engagement on employment and income over time.

**Qualitative aims.** The second and third research questions were answered through qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with low-income individuals 18 and older who lived in one of the *Making Connections* sites, Providence, RI, and were

civically engaged. These qualitative interviews were included in the study to examine the ways participation in civic engagement provided access to social and human capital assets for low-income individuals, and the ways this access influenced economic opportunities. Special attention was paid to the outcomes suggested by social capital and human capital theories, specifically the impact on employment outcomes. Both the quantitative and qualitative data sources and analyses are detailed below.



**Figure 3.1.** Mixed Methods Research Design

## Data Sources

The data for this study came from two sources: the *Making Connections* (2012) survey and in-person semi-structured interviews with low-income individuals living in one *Making Connections* site, Providence, RI.

**Quantitative data.** To address the first research question, survey data were used from the *Making Connections* initiative. By design, the *Making Connections* survey was part of a decade-long initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) aimed to assess the needs of families and children and to foster supportive communities that

strengthen connections to economic opportunity, positive social networks, and effective services and supports in the ten sites.<sup>26</sup> The sampling frame for the quantitative portion of the study included individuals from households living in one of the ten *Making Connections* metropolitan areas: Denver, CO; Des Moines, IA; Hartford, CT; Indianapolis, IN; Louisville, KY; Milwaukee, WI; Oakland, CA; Providence, RI; San Antonio, TX; and Seattle, WA. These ten low-income neighborhoods were selected because they had community support organizations that were engaged in community outreach that was consistent with the AECF's mission to support families and children, and could facilitate collection on the ground.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the survey neighborhoods were characterized by low overall socioeconomic status, which allowed for exploration between civic engagement and economic mobility among a population often excluded from work that examines these two constructs.

This analyses for this dissertation focused on the adult population (18 and older) and followed this group from 2002-2011. The survey was administered approximately every three years during the ten-year period. Baseline (Wave 1) survey data were gathered between 2002 and 2004 in the ten sites and a first follow-up effort (Wave 2) was completed between 2005 and 2007 in each site. Between 2008 and 2011, data were collected for a second round of follow-up interviews (Wave 3) in just seven of the ten sites.

The main questionnaire topics included neighborhood connections, neighborhood actions, services and amenities, organizations and volunteerism, family hardship, income

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<sup>26</sup>A number of organizations contributed to the design, implementation, and analysis of this research: the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, The Urban Institute (UI), research advisors from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago and Case Western Reserve University, and representatives from each of the ten *Making Connections* sites.

<sup>27</sup> While the initiative intended to produce community-wide, long-term improvements in disadvantaged neighborhoods, the main contribution of the survey data was to supply information about the experiences and needs of residents in the target neighborhoods rather than an evaluation of specific programs (Bachtell, 2012).

and assets, and demographics. A separate set of questions was devoted to the experiences of children living in the household, including items about childcare arrangements, schooling, participation in extracurricular activities, and health. Interviews for the *Making Connections* surveys were executed using a paper and pencil questionnaire that was then keyed into a computer assisted data entry system (CADE).

After review of several national data sets, this survey was selected as the best source of data for understanding long-term patterns of the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes for low-income individuals and to answer the first research question. Unlike other longitudinal data sets that included both indicators of civic engagement and economic outcomes (e.g., Panel Study of Income Dynamics, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth), the *Making Connections* survey provided the most robust measures of civic engagement. Many of these measures were derived from questions that appeared in other well-known surveys such as the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (SCCBS), and the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF). Therefore, the diverse array of civic engagement measures (described further below) coupled with a rich set of valid and reliable demographic measures helped to provide an adequate answer to Research Question 1. Approval was received from the Brandeis University Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as the AECF to access the restricted-use data set (IRB Protocol #13100).

***Quantitative sampling design.*** The *Making Connections* study design combined both cross-sectional and longitudinal methodologies, but this study only used data for longitudinal analyses. In the baseline year (Wave 1), a semi-random two-pronged approach



was employed to select a respondent to speak on behalf of each household. The key distinction was whether or not there were any children under age 18 living in the household. In households with children, one child was randomly selected to be the focal child, and the parent or guardian who knew the most about the focal child was chosen as the respondent (meaning the selection of the respondent was not random). In adult-only households, the focal child selection process was skipped and one adult was randomly chosen to be the respondent.

In Waves 2 and 3, interviewers revisited these sampled addresses in person or by telephone with the goal of collecting data with the current occupants. Many times, the occupants did not change, but other times, new people had moved in. *Making Connections* is also longitudinal in that the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) re-interviewed families that remained at sampled addresses within target neighborhoods, and tracked families with children that moved to a new address either inside or outside of the neighborhood. Therefore, the *Making Connections* survey provided data from a panel of households with children (the panel of households interviewed in Waves 1, 2, and 3 were representative of households with children who resided in the *Making Connections* neighborhood at Wave 1) and a panel of adult-only households who did not move (households that did not include children in Wave 1 were re-interviewed in Wave 2 and 3 provided that they remained in the same address). This dissertation used longitudinal data from individuals in households who either lived in the same housing unit in all three waves or were out-movers and were interviewed at their new units in Wave 2 or 3.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Adult-only households that moved after Wave 1 or 2 and households with children that moved and in which the focal child turned 18 or older by Wave 2 or three were not included in this panel sample.

**Quantitative study sample.** Although AECF selected ten communities for a cross-site investigation in the form of a household survey, this dissertation's sample consisted of low-income individuals 18 and older living in one of seven communities for which data are available in all three waves of the *Making Connections* survey: Denver, CO; Des Moines, IA; Indianapolis, IN; Louisville, KY; Providence, RI; San Antonio, TX; and Seattle, WA from 2002 to 2011 (Hendey et al., 2012). However, while the full survey sample included 1,892 individuals living in survey neighborhoods, the socioeconomic characteristics of these neighborhoods varied considerably and not all households were low-income. After calculating which households were low-income (described further in the data analysis section), the final quantitative study sample included 1,139 households that were at or below 200% of the federal poverty threshold. A full table of quantitative study sample characteristics can be found in Appendix A, Table A.1.

**Qualitative data.** While the *Making Connections* survey provided information about the long-term effects of civic engagement on economic outcomes, it could not fully explain the relationship between the two constructs. Semi-structured qualitative interviews with civically engaged low-income individuals in Providence, RI provided additional insight into the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes. This analysis served to answer the second and third research questions of the study and complement the quantitative data to better understand the ways social and human capital explain the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes for low-income individuals. In addition, the qualitative data helped explain more about the significant results in the quantitative phase, as well as the nonsignificant

results that were contrary to hypotheses and social and human capital theories (Creswell et al., 2003).

IRB approval (IRB Protocol #13100) was obtained through Brandeis University to conduct semi-structured interviews with civically engaged low-income individuals ages 18 and older. The three primary criteria for inclusion in the sample were that participants: 1.) participated in at least one form of civic engagement in the past one to five years; 2.) resided in Providence, RI; and 3.) were age 18 or older. Participants could be of any race/ethnicity, gender, or employment status. Providence, RI was selected as the qualitative data collection site for two primary reasons. First, of the seven *Making Connections* cities, 61% of in Providence participants were engaged in at least one of the six forms of civic engagement, which was close to the average participation percentage across all study sites (64%).<sup>29</sup> Second, between 2008-2012, of the seven *Making Connections* sites, Providence had the highest percentage of households in poverty at 27.9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012c).<sup>30</sup>

***Qualitative sample, recruitment, and data collection.*** The qualitative portion of this study used a purposeful sampling strategy (Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990). The sampling frame included current or former low-income individuals living in Providence, RI, who were civically engaged. Snowball sampling also occurred during the course of the study when participants suggested someone else who was willing or appropriate for the study (Maxwell, 2005), and this occurred in ten cases. This sampling technique was not intended to produce a representative or random sample but rather to collect data on a

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<sup>29</sup> Indianapolis, IN and Louisville, KY were also considered and had an average participation percentage of 65% and 66%, respectively, but were not selected due to resource constraints.

<sup>30</sup> This percentage underestimates those who are low-income, or at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines; for instance, in 2012, 22.5% of all residents in Providence County had incomes at or below 125% of the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012d).

small number of individuals who could speak to a diverse range of civic engagement experiences.

Recruitment took place between November 2013 and February 2014. To ensure representativeness and heterogeneity of the population as well as to ensure that individuals in the sample provided answers to the questions in this study (Maxwell, 2005), civic leaders in Providence assisted with recruitment for the semi-structured interviews across multiple organizations in the area. Participants were also recruited through Internet searchers and correspondence, e-mail, flyers, listservs, social media sites, and phone. Flyers were posted at local nonprofit and service organizations, in public libraries and buildings, and at community centers. Additionally, e-mail announcements and flyers were sent to over 50 representatives from organizations, who then disseminated information to their networks. All outreach materials listed a dedicated email address and phone number for this study. These procedures were completed in multiple rounds over the course of the study to ensure adequate sample size.

Once participants confirmed they met the inclusion criteria and wanted to participate in the study, a time was scheduled to conduct the interview. All interviews were conducted in person and were administered with as little variation as possible (e.g., in interview location, permissions procedures) so that bias was not introduced into the process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). One organization provided a space to conduct 19 of the 31 interviews, and two other organizations provided space for seven interviews. Three of the remaining interviews took place at a coffee shop, one interview took place at the participant's place of employment, and another was conducted at a homeless service organization.

Prior to participating in the interviews, individuals reviewed and signed an informed consent form that detailed the purpose of the study, the risks and benefits, the actions of the interviewer to ensure confidentiality, as well as a request to audio record the interview (see Appendix B for contents of the consent form). All participants agreed to be recorded. Participants were asked to sign two copies of the form and were given one of the signed copies to keep. Study participants were asked if they understood the informed consent form and were encouraged to ask any questions about the information covered on the consent form. In addition, participants were instructed that they could opt not to answer any questions and could end the interview at any time.

Following informed consent procedures, each participant was given the option to fill out a demographic intake form before the interview, and all participants agreed to complete the form (see Appendix C for the form). The interviews lasted between 35 and 80 minutes, with most interviews lasting an average of one hour. An interview guide served to steer the semi-structured interviews towards themes that were identified in the literature as important for understanding the relationships between civic engagement and economic outcomes, while maintaining an open grounded theory approach that allowed for the development of new themes (Charmaz, 2006). The semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix D) was structured around the following content areas: civic engagement experiences, opportunities for civic engagement, access to social and human capital via civic engagement, and employment experiences. Although the interviews were structured using the interview guide, the interviewer occasionally diverged from the guide to pursue additional lines of questioning based on unanticipated topics raised by individual participants that were pertinent to the research questions and theoretical

frameworks. All participants received a \$20 Visa gift card for participation.<sup>31</sup>

Between January and February 2014, 31 interviews were conducted. Over half (61%) study sample was between the ages of 18-50, 55% of participants were female, and 48% identified as Black or African American. The majority of participants (87%) completed high school or their GED. Over half of participants (58%) received some form of public assistance, and several participants received more than one form of public assistance.<sup>32</sup> While 16% of participants were employed full time, 26% part-time, and 13% were unemployed and looking for a job, 32% of participants identified their employment status as “volunteer.” Thirteen-percent of respondents made \$500 or less a month, and 23% of study participants made between \$500 and \$1,000 a month. Only three study participants made above \$30,000 a year.<sup>33</sup> Table A.2 in Appendix A presents the full demographic information for the qualitative sample.

## **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed in three phases. First, descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were conducted to answer the first research question. Second, grounded theory and thematic analysis was used to address second and third research questions. Finally, the findings from these two analysis strategies were examined alongside each other to inform overall findings and interpretation.

**Quantitative data analysis.** The quantitative analysis aimed to examine the effect of civic engagement on the economic outcomes of employment and income for

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<sup>31</sup> Previous participants in the *Making Connections* study received \$20 per interview. In Bachtell (2012), 35 qualitative interviews were conducted.

<sup>32</sup> Thirteen participants received SNAP, five received Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), three received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), three mentioned living in Section 8 housing, three mentioned receiving funding for Pell Grants or student loans, and two mentioned receiving assistance from the Rhode Island Works program.

<sup>33</sup> Ten study participants did not answer the income question, either for monthly or annual income.

low-income individuals in seven cities in the United States. Based on the literature, the following hypotheses were derived from the first research question:

**Hypothesis 1.1:** Participation in civic engagement will have a positive and significant effect on economic outcomes for low-income individuals over time.

**Hypothesis 1.2:** Over time, economic outcomes for low-income individuals will vary by form of civic engagement.

Six forms of civic engagement (as well as an overall measure) and two economic outcome measures – employment and income – were used in these analyses and are detailed below. For each of these hypotheses, multiple models were run to test each economic outcome.

First, descriptive statistics were generated to gain a greater understanding of the sample's demographics, participation in civic engagement, and economic outcomes. Second, bivariate analyses were conducted to determine the direction and differences between those who were civically engaged and not civically engaged on a variety of measures, with an emphasis on economic outcomes. Finally, to account for the panel nature of the *Making Connections* data, multivariate models were used to analyze the effects of participation in civic engagement on the economic outcomes of low-income households over time. Since an ordinary least squares (OLS) model in which dependent observations were pooled would result in biased estimates, fixed or random effects should be used to control for the clustering across households in the quantitative sample. Because these two panel modeling techniques compare relative changes between the baseline (Wave 1) and other time periods (Waves 2 and 3) rather than raw differences

between groups, panel regression can address concerns related to baseline differences in economic outcomes between those who participated in civic engagement and those who did not. Fixed and random effects modeling techniques can control for unobserved effects that are unique to the study unit (household) to examine the change in each of the outcomes over the ten-year study period (Wooldridge, 2009).

In choosing between the fixed and random effects models, the random effects model has some advantages because it will be more efficient (have smaller standard errors) than the fixed effects model assuming that the error term is not correlated with the regressors. Also, unlike the fixed effects model, time invariant variables may be included in the random effects model. However, random effects assumes that the error term is not correlated with the regressors, an assumption which is often difficult to meet (Wooldridge, 2009).

A Hausman test was conducted for each of the multivariate models to test whether a random effects model would be unbiased. The test was significant under all model specifications tested ( $p \leq .05$ ), which meant that the assumptions of the random effects model were not met in the analysis for this dissertation and that the fixed effects model must be used. Given the results of the Hausman test, all multivariate models presented in the analysis of civic engagement and economic outcomes using the *Making Connections* data used fixed effects analysis.

One appealing feature of the fixed effects models used in this study was that the effects of all observed or unobserved variables affecting economic outcomes that did not



change from one wave to another did not bias the coefficient estimates.<sup>34</sup> Selection effects were also controlled when the basis for inclusion or exclusion from the sample was not a function of the dependent variable in the analysis, which allowed for stronger and more valid inferences about the effects of civic engagement on economic outcomes than can be made in many alternate methods (Johnson, 1995). In the fixed effects models, characteristics of study units (in this study, households) that did not change over time were controlled for using a dummy variable for each unit. While this controlled for all measured and unmeasured characteristics of the units that were time invariant, the fixed effects models could not include any time-invariant variables such as race or gender, because these characteristics were already controlled for in the model.<sup>35</sup> Thus, time invariant variables that may be of interest were not included in the fixed effects models. Several iterations of a basic model that take the following form were executed and are presented in Chapter 4:

$$Economic_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 civic_{it} + \beta_2 education_{it} + \beta_3 spouse_{it} + \beta_4 children_{it} + \beta_5 welfare_{it} + a_{it} + u_{it}$$

Where subscripts  $i$  and  $t$  denoted individual households and time respectively and *civic* represented the form of civic engagement under study. *Education<sub>it</sub>* indicated whether the respondent had an education level of high school graduation/GED or higher in time  $t$ ; *spouse<sub>it</sub>* indicated whether the household respondent had a spouse living in the household at time  $t$ ; *children<sub>it</sub>* indicated whether the household respondent had children in the household at time  $t$ ; and *welfare<sub>it</sub>* indicated if the respondent received public assistance or

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<sup>34</sup> This is because the variables have been expressed only in terms of change within individuals. Differences between individuals that have a constant effect on economic mobility do not vary over time (Johnson, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> However, it is possible to estimate the effects of the interaction of time-invariant and time varying measures (Johnson, 1995).

welfare at time  $t$ . The unobserved effect that was unchanging and specific to households was captured by  $a_i$ , while  $u_{it}$  captured the idiosyncratic error that changed in each time period (Wooldridge, 2009).

Models were conducted using the raw, log, and log per capita form of income. Given the skewed distribution of income in the United States, researchers often prefer to use the logged value of income in regression models, as logging the values of these variables helps to normalize the distribution and ease interpretation as a percent change, rather than a change in raw dollar values. However, because the log of negative and zero values is undefined, logging values can lead to a loss of observations and sample selection outcomes. Although sometimes one dollar is added to models so zero values can be included and the overall distribution remains unchanged, because there were only 26, or 2.35%, observations that were zero in the logged model that would have been lost, the zero values were manually entered into the logged variable. All models also included survey dummies with Wave 1 as the base year to capture macroeconomic and time trends.

The *Making Connections* dataset provided data from respondents at the household level, and a household level weight was used for all descriptive and bivariate analyses in all years to correct for the study design and oversampling of subgroups. The multivariate analyses presented in this dissertation were not weighted. A debate exists in the literature about whether multivariate analyses should be weighted. However, if unweighted and weighted results are similar, results without weights are preferred (Winship & Radbill, 1994).

**Database transformation.** Because the socioeconomic characteristics in the *Making Connections* neighborhoods varied, not all of the 1,892 households in the dataset included households were above 200% of the federal poverty threshold. For this reason, data were transformed to capture the low-income sample, and this section explains the process.

*Missing data.* Because the income variable was a key variable in determining which households were at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, missing data for the income variable was examined across all three waves. There were 206, 573, and 476 missing values for income across Waves 1, 2, and 3, respectively. However, in Waves 2 and 3, the survey asked a follow-up question with ranges of data to help fill in this missing data. These ranges were able to capture about 314 (55%) of the 573 missing data respondents in Wave 2 and 234 (49%) of the 476 missing data respondents in Wave 3.<sup>36</sup>

*Income variable definition.* One limitation of the survey data was that income was measured differently in Wave 1 than in Waves 2 and 3. In Wave 1, income was measured as a categorical variable, and in Waves 2 and 3, income was measured as a continuous variable (see Appendix E for specific categorical variable definitions). Because a low-income variable needed to be calculated, it was necessary to use a continuous variable to calculate for this purpose. In the past, NORC researchers have used Wave 2 to capture income in analyses instead (K. Bachtell, personal communication, September 3, 2013). For this reason, Wave 2 was used as a proxy for Wave 1 in this analysis to define the

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<sup>36</sup> The percentages and categories of missing data respondents in Wave 2 were: 30% “less than or about \$10,000,” 13% in the “less than or about \$20,000,” 6% of missing data “less than or about \$30,000,” 3% “less than or about \$40,000,” 1% “less than or about \$50,000,” .3% “less than \$60,000,” 1% of “less than or about \$70,000,” .3% were more than \$80,000, \$90,000, and \$100,000. The percentages and categories of missing data respondents in Wave 3 were: 28% “less than or about \$10,000, 10% “less than or about \$20,000,” 6% “less than or about \$30,000,” 3% of “less than or about \$40,000,” 2% of “less than or about \$50,000,” .2% of “less than \$60,000,” .6% “less than or about \$70,000,” and .2% were about \$80,000.

low-income sample. (See below for a comparison between Wave 1 and Wave 2 for the final study sample.)

*Calculating the low-income variable and finalizing the sample.* A file with syntax in SAS was available in the NORC Data Enclave to calculate low-income households in Waves 2 and 3. This syntax was previously used in other studies using these data (Hendey et al., 2012), and was modified for Stata for this dissertation. First, after filling in the missing data using the suggested ranges, a “final household income” variable was created for Waves 2 and 3. Next, a variable was calculated that defined the level of poverty in each household. Factors that were considered in this variable calculation included household income, number of adults in the household, number of children in the household, and adult age (either above or below 65). Based on these factors, a variable was created that calculated whether household income was above or below the poverty line in Waves 2 and 3. Finally, a variable was created that calculated whether household income was at or below 200% of the poverty line. It was found that in Wave 2 there were 1,139 households in Wave 2 and 1,155 households in Wave 3 who were at or below 200% of the poverty line.<sup>37</sup>

*Comparing income in Wave 1 to Wave 2.* Given the limitations of the Wave 1 income variable and because Wave 2 was used as a proxy for Wave 1, it was necessary to recode the Wave 2 variable into a categorical variable and compare it to Wave 1 to see whether discrepancies exist (see Appendix E for specific variable categories in Wave 1). First, it was found that out of the 1,139 households in Wave 2, 733 were in different

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<sup>37</sup> It is important to note that if the “final income variable” was missing it automatically became a “zero” in the calculations, which occurred for 238 households. Therefore, of the 753 households above the 200% of the poverty line, 31% were due to missing data. This means that the number of households at or below 200% of the poverty line is likely understated in this study sample.

categories in Wave 1. However, the majority of these households experienced very little movement. With the exception of 112 households, all income mobility occurred within the \$0 to \$25,000 range. Even among these 112 households, only 37 households experienced significant downward mobility between Waves 1 and 2 (e.g., going from a higher to lower income category), which suggested that the majority downward moves in income between Waves 1 and 2 were fairly small. All of the other households experienced upward mobility between Waves 1 and 2, but were still considered low-income in Wave 2, meaning they would have been considered low-income in Wave 1 as well. This finding confirmed that the estimate of low-income households in this study was conservative; there were several households with lower incomes in Wave 1 than in Wave 2.

Table 3.1 shows the numbers of households who experienced mobility in different income categories. The categories included: 1=\$0-\$4,999, 2=\$5,000-\$9,999, 3=\$10,000-\$14,999, 4=\$15,000-\$19,999, 5=\$20,000-\$24,999, 6=\$25,000-\$29,999, 7=\$30,000. For instance, “1 category move” could mean a move from category 2 to 3 (upward mobility), or 3 to 2 (downward mobility).

**Table 3.1.** Income mobility between Waves 1 and 2 (N=733)

<b>Category moves (N)</b>	<b>Upward Mobility (N)</b>	<b>Downward Mobility (N)</b>
1 category move	231	117
2 category moves	117	74
3 category moves	62	43
4 category moves	26	26
5 category moves	12	15
6 category moves	5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>280</b>

This table showed that of the 733 households that had different incomes between Waves 1 and 2, 453 (62%) were low-income in Wave 1 because Wave 1 estimates were lower than in Wave 2. Thus, because individuals were low-income in Wave 2, their lower incomes in Wave 1 provided assurance that they were low-income. For the households who experienced downward mobility between the two waves, 67% of the downward mobility occurred within the \$0 to \$25,000 range. This analysis justified that using the 1,139 households who were low-income in Wave 2 was appropriate for this study. While this issue remains a limitation, when breaking these two categories down and analyzing them alongside each other, it became clear that there were no major differences in income between Waves 1 and 2. This comparison also confirmed that the study sample was a conservative estimate of who was low-income in the overall sample.

**Variables.** To understand the long-term impact of civic engagement on economic outcomes, this study looked longitudinally at the trends and impacts of civic engagement on economic mobility over the ten-year period 2002-2011. The dataset included economic outcome measures (dependent variables) and civic engagement, demographic, and survey wave measures (independent variables and control variables).

The two economic outcomes examined in these analyses were employment and income. Employment was a dichotomous variable defined as whether the respondent was employed, and was examined in this study across all three waves (2002-2011). Income was a continuous variable defined as total household income, but due to the categorical nature of the Wave 1 income variable, income was only examined in this study across Waves 2 and 3 (2005-2011). The six civic engagement variables and overall civic engagement measure were dichotomous variables defined as whether the respondent was

engaged in a particular form of civic engagement across the three waves. Each of the demographic variables used in the multivariate analyses were broken into dichotomous variables. Table 3.2 presents a summary of the variables this dataset included. (See Appendix E for the ways variables were defined in the *Making Connections* survey and transformed for this study.) All demographic variables were included in the models except for the time invariant variables age, gender, and race/ethnicity, which were captured by the household's fixed effect in the model.<sup>38</sup>

All descriptive analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 18. Fixed effects multivariate models and Hausman tests were conducted using Stata MP 12. *Making Connections* data was available in wide format and was converted to long format for fixed effects analyses.

**Qualitative data analysis.** The qualitative data collection was driven by the study's research questions and guided by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). While data collection was ongoing, the transcripts were transcribed verbatim. As a preliminary step, the interview transcripts and field note data were read through to develop a general understanding of the database, and notes were taken in the form of memoing as a first step in forming broader codes and themes. Once reviewed for transcription errors and cleaned of any identifying information, the transcripts were loaded into Atlas.ti Version 7 and organized by participant ID number. This qualitative software was used to organize and track the codes and themes for the study.

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<sup>38</sup> Although education is often considered to be a time invariant variable, because the value of the variable steadily increased over the three waves of data, education was included in the models. In addition, owning a home was used in preliminary models, but was removed from the final model due to very little variation in owning a home across the waves of data.

**Table 3.2.** Variables for Quantitative Analysis of *Making Connections*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>DEPENDENT VARIABLES</b>		
<b>Employment</b>	Change in employment status	Employed or not employed (2002-2011)
<b>Income</b>	Change in income level	Total household income (2005-2011)
<b>INDEPENDENT VARIABLES</b>		
<b>Civic Engagement</b>	Volunteered	Over past 12 months volunteered or helped out with activities in community
	Served as an officer	Over past 12 months served as an officer or served on a committee of any local club or organization or religious organization
	Spoken with political official	Spoke with a local political official like a city councilman, county supervisor, or state legislator about a neighborhood problem or improvement
	Spoken with religious leader	Talked to a local religious leader or minister to help with a neighborhood problem or neighborhood improvement
	Gotten together to fix problem	Got together with neighbors to do something about a neighborhood problem or to organize neighborhood improvement
	Gave financial help	Over past 12 months gave financial help, either to other people they live with or to friends and family outside
	Overall civic engagement	Participation in one or more of the six civic engagement measures
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	Age	Age in years
	Gender	Female or male
	Race/Ethnicity	Six categorical variables: Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American/Alaska Native, Other Race/Ethnicity, White/Caucasian
	Education	Has education level of a high school diploma/GED or higher
	Spouse in housing unit	Has spouse in housing unit
	Children in household	Has children in household
	Own house	Owns home
	Received SNAP/food stamps	Receives SNAP/welfare
	Received TANF/welfare	Receives TANF/welfare
<b>Wave of Survey Interview</b>	Wave 1	Survey Wave 1 (2002-2004)
	Wave 2	Survey Wave 2 (2005-2007)
	Wave 3	Survey Wave 3 (2008-2011)



A “core feature” of qualitative data analysis is the coding process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 132), and a qualitative codebook was developed to categorize these codes inductively and deductively (Charmaz, 1983; Maxwell, 2005). A thematic framework was identified and constructed based on an interpretation of methods by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) and Maxwell (2005). First, organizational categories were established prior to the interviews based on prior knowledge from the civic engagement, social capital, human capital, and economic mobility literatures, as well as insights from the quantitative analyses. Second, in keeping with grounded theory, substantive categories were created based on descriptive information of interview participants’ concepts and beliefs and were developed through an open coding of the data. The emergent themes were used to guide the content and direction of future interviews. Finally, theoretical categories were derived either from prior theory or from an inductively developed theory (Charmaz, 2006). Full syntheses of these organizational, substantive, and theoretical categories were used to create the final codebook.

Interview coding began in January 2014 and concluded in April 2014, and interviews were continually analyzed and compared to define relationships between categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The categories and codes were then grouped into broader themes, which were then organized according to how they related to each other and the research questions. The first group of key themes analyzed the ways participation in civic engagement provided access to social and human capital assets:

- Broadened social network; bonding social capital; bridging social capital

- Goals to develop skills and knowledge; acquisition of hard and soft skills; formal and informal skill development; bringing knowledge, skills, and experiences to civic role
- Conditions of the civic engagement experience; influence of conditions more than form of civic engagement itself
- Social capital access point related to human capital skill development; used human capital knowledge to influence or build social capital

Second, themes highlighted the ways access to social and human capital assets within a civic engagement opportunity influenced economic opportunities:

- Social capital and human capital's influence on past and future economic opportunities
- Alignment of civic engagement, social and human capital assets, and economic opportunities
- Social capital as a pathway to human capital; interrelated nature of both types of assets in relation to economic opportunities

After key themes were defined, data from the interviews were analyzed using these themes and their corresponding sub-themes to validate findings and confirm these as the strongest themes in the experiences of study participants. The findings in these areas are described in Chapters 5 and 6.

### **Overall Findings and Interpretation**

Throughout the dissertation process, analyses from both the quantitative and qualitative portions were examined alongside one another, examining areas of convergence and difference between the two study components (Creswell, 2009). Results

from the quantitative analyses were incorporated into qualitative memos and were used to inform the selection of the qualitative sample and structure of the interviews. The memos were also be used to explain patterns, relationships, or themes between qualitative and quantitative aspects of the study throughout the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2006). These memos were synthesized and incorporated into a write-up of the final results, which were organized by research question and themes in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

## **Limitations**

The mixed methods research design for this study offered several strengths in terms of the quantitative and qualitative data sources and analysis, but also had some limitations.

***Quantitative limitations.*** One limitation and source of selection bias of the *Making Connections* data was that the neighborhoods from which the sample was drawn were not representative of any larger geographic or municipal populations. The AECF selected neighborhoods for the survey with assistance from local leaders based on the presence of existing grassroots or community organizations whose missions were consistent with the objectives of the *Making Connections* initiative. It is possible that disadvantaged communities in other cities in the United States may yield different findings. In addition, the *Making Connections* initiative did not follow movers without children at any wave, so this population was not included as a part of the panel data for this study.

The most noteworthy limitations in the quantitative analyses were related to the economic outcome measures. As noted, the analyses focused on employment and income, but the data did not include information on other employment characteristics (e.g., self-

employment) and the income variable is limited in how it was measured over time. Given these limitations, the analyses in this dissertation cover only one part of the total picture of the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes among low-income individuals.

***Qualitative limitations.*** One potential threat to the study's internal validity was that different individuals were selected for the qualitative component than the quantitative component. Moreover, while the purpose of the qualitative interviews was to capture the in-depth experiences of civic engagement and economic outcomes, findings from the qualitative sample were limited by the sample size. Further research with larger samples following up on the themes identified in this study would add to the analysis by allowing for greater generalizability and analysis of population subgroups (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender).

In addition, the interview data provided self-reported data, which may be biased by participants' desire to omit certain information they do not wish to reveal. Specifically, because the interviews relied on self-reported data, they were open to social desirability bias, which occurs when participants are asked questions about giving money or time (Rooney, Steinberg, & Schervish, 2004). Although social desirability may lead to over-reporting of donations or time spent volunteering, Hall (2001) believes recall bias to be a more serious problem. Memory of past experiences with civic engagement could vary and thus self-reported data may have some imprecision due to the availability of respondents to accurately report and recall information about the interview topic. Although bias from self-report was possible, because the interviews focused more on the social and human capital aspects of the civic experiences and not the number of dollars

donated or hours volunteered, the bias or omission due to self-report was likely to be small.

An additional source of bias stemmed from the sampling strategy, which primarily targeted individuals already affiliated with an organization or institution. Because this study only sampled individuals who already had a relationship with a civic organization or group, those who were not affiliated with organizations were excluded. However, because purpose of the study was to understand the effects of civic engagement on economic opportunity, this sampling strategy remained appropriate.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the methods used to address the research questions on the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes among low-income individuals in the United States. The mixed methods research design offered an opportunity to investigate the relationship between civic engagement and economic opportunities using two data sources. First, longitudinal household-level data through the *Making Connections* survey provided access over 1,100 low-income households across seven metropolitan areas in the United States. Second, the strength of the semi-structured interviews with individuals in Providence, RI helped to explain the relationship found through the quantitative data. The findings from this study are divided into three sections: the effects of civic engagement on economic outcomes (Chapter 4), access to social and human capital via civic engagement (Chapter 5), and access to economic opportunities via civic engagement (Chapter 6).

## **Chapter 4. The Effects of Civic Engagement on Economic Outcomes for Low-income Individuals**

### **Overview**

The impact of current policies aimed at helping low-income individuals become upwardly mobile are limited, and more innovative research efforts are necessary to understand factors related to job attainment and upward income mobility. Participation in civic engagement activities in the public and nonprofit sectors is regularly linked to these types of improved economic outcomes, yet little is known about the ways civic engagement is related to changes in employment and income for individuals who are low-income. This chapter tested the relationships between civic engagement, employment, and income among low-income individuals using three waves of *Making Connections* survey data (2002-2011). Analyses responded to research question 1 and its corresponding hypothesis:

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does participation in civic engagement affect economic outcomes for low-income individuals over time, and in what ways do economic outcomes vary by form of civic engagement?

**Hypothesis 1.1:** Participation in civic engagement will have a positive and significant effect on economic outcomes for low-income individuals over time.

**Hypothesis 1.2:** Over time, economic outcomes for low-income individuals will vary by form of civic engagement.

### **Overview of the Study Sample**

As described in the previous chapter, a sub-sample of the *Making Connections* data was used in this analysis. Of the 1,892 observations that were a part of all three waves of the survey, 1,139 households (60%) met the inclusion criteria for this study: income at or below 200% of the poverty line in data collection Waves 1 and 2.

**Sample description.** In Wave 1, respondents ranged in age from 18-75, with a mean age of 40. The majority (77%) of the sample identified as female across all three waves. The sample was racially and ethnically diverse, with the majority of respondents identifying as Hispanic/Latino (51%), Other Race/Ethnicity (42%), White/Caucasian (39%), and/or Black/African American (15%). See Table 4.1 for a summary of these sample characteristics.

Table A.1 in Appendix A provides a breakdown of the study sample by each of the three waves and shows that little change occurred across the sample over the ten-year period. Educational attainment increased slightly by two percentage points for those who had graduated from high school/with their GED or higher. Those respondents living in a household with a spouse decreased from 48% to 44% over time. Close to three-quarters of the respondents had children. In the sample, the percentage of respondents who owned their home hovered around 30%. Given that this population was low-income, 37% of respondents received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/food stamps in Wave 1, but this percentage grew slightly over the ten-year period. The percentage of respondents who received TANF/welfare was an average of 43% across the three waves.

**Table 4.1.** Sample Description (Wave 1)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Age and Gender</b>		
Age (mean)	40 (15.879)	1,063
Female	77%	841
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Hispanic/Latino	51%	320
Other Race/Ethnicity	42%	337
White/Caucasian	39%	359
Black/African American	15%	344
Native American/Alaska Native	3%	27
Asian	2%	44
<b>Education</b>		
High school graduation/GED or higher	57%	693
<b>Family structure</b>		
Spouse in housing unit	48%	469
Children in household	72%	832
<b>Homeownership</b>		
Own house	30%	294
<b>Public Assistance</b>		
Received SNAP/Food Stamps	37%	488
Received TANF/Welfare	42%	468

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> All descriptive statistics were weighted. N's were unweighted.

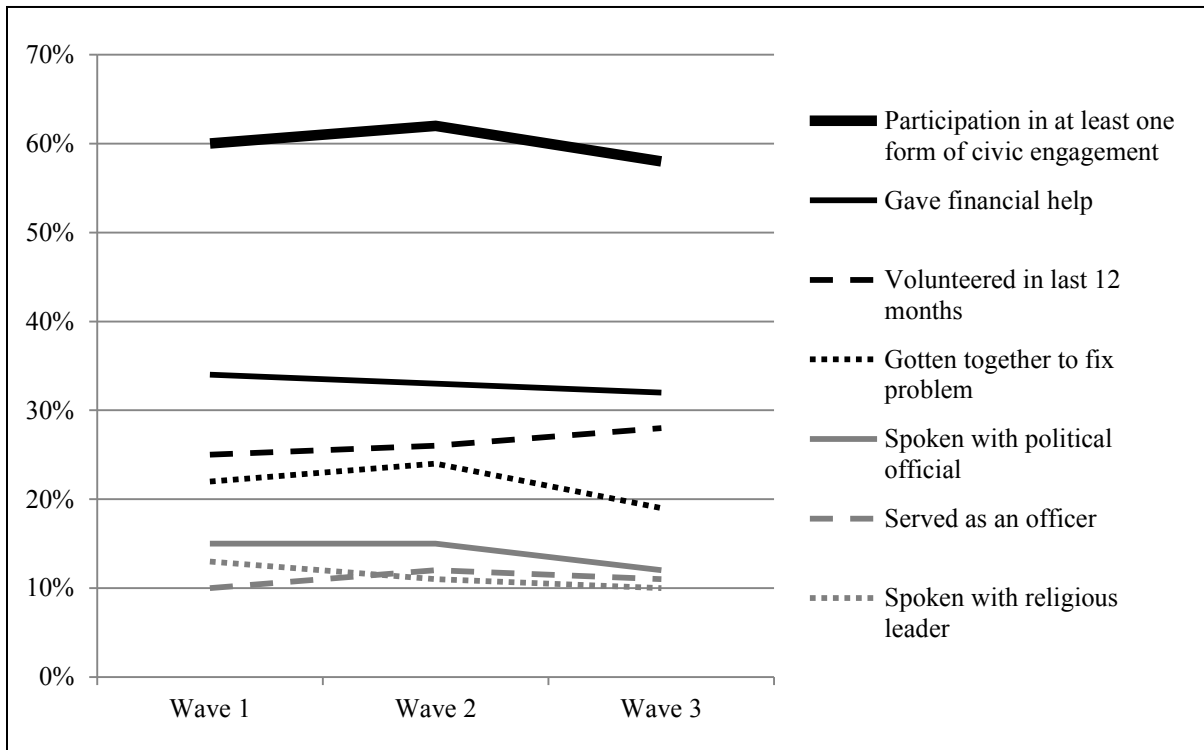
<sup>2</sup> Standard deviations are shown in parenthesis for continuous variables.

<sup>3</sup> Survey asked respondents whether they identify as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, but N's were too low to report.

**Civic engagement.** Study participants participated in multiple forms of civic engagement between Waves 1 and 3. Over time, survey respondents were most likely to give money to family or friends, volunteer, and get together to fix a problem in their neighborhood, but were less likely to speak with a political official, serve as an officer, or



speak with a religious leader. An average of 34 % of participants participated in more than one form of civic engagement across all three waves. While there is little change in civic engagement over the ten-year period, Figure 4.1 shows that over half of the sample was civically engaged across all three waves.



**Figure 4.1.** Civic Engagement Trends Over Time

**Employment and income.** Approximately half of the sample was employed across all three waves (Table A.1 in Appendix A). While there was slight variation in income over time, the majority of households remained below \$25,000 in both of these years (79% and 76% in Waves 1 and 2, respectively). In Wave 3, however, 37% of households made at or above \$25,000. Median income, which was only available in Waves 2 and 3, increased from \$15,000 to \$18,000 between the two waves. Overall,

employment and income changed little over the ten-year period. See Table 4.2 for a summary of the economic outcomes in Wave 1.

**Table 4.2.** Economic Outcomes (Wave 1)

Variable	Percent	N
<i>Employment</i>		
Employed	49%	547
<i>Income (Categorical)</i>		
\$0-\$4,999	14%	179
\$5,000-\$9,999	17%	170
\$10,000-\$14,999	19%	190
\$15,000-\$19,999	17%	154
\$20,000-\$24,999	12%	111
\$25,000-\$29,999	8%	66
\$30,000+	14%	144

Note: All descriptive statistics were weighted. N's were unweighted.

### The Relationship Between Civic Engagement and Employment

Research suggests that the act of civic engagement could positively influence employment for low-income individuals, but little is known about the relationship between different forms of civic engagement and employment over time. This section focused on understanding the relationship between civic engagement and employment status over the three study waves. Analyses were conducted to examine the strength of this relationship, as well as differences in employment outcomes between those who were civically engaged and those who were not over time.

First, correlations were run to examine the relationship between the six forms of civic engagement (and an overall civic engagement measure) and employment status from 2002 to 2011. (See Table A.4 in Appendix F for correlations between all independent civic engagement variables with each other.) Civic engagement variables

were significantly correlated with employment in the sample, but only consistently for four of the civic engagement variables. As seen in Table 4.3, across all three waves, volunteering, serving as an officer, giving financial help to family or friends, and overall participation were significantly positively correlated with employment.<sup>39</sup> There was not a consistent significant and positive relationship between the three other civic engagement measures and employment.

**Table 4.3.** Paired correlations between civic engagement and employment

Variable	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Volunteered in last 12 months	0.012*	0.030***	0.084***
Served as an officer	-0.016**	-0.022***	0.030***
Spoke with political official	-0.037***	-0.006	0.002
Spoke with religious leader	-0.043***	0.037***	-0.003
Got together to fix problem	0.002	0.000	-0.011*
Gave financial help	0.127***	0.150***	0.099***
Overall civic engagement	0.075***	0.074***	0.086***

Note: Due to the dichotomous nature of these variables, the phi coefficient is reported. Analyses were weighted.

\*p≤.05, \*\*p≤.01, \*\*\*p≤.001

Next, to test group differences, the six forms of engagement and overall civic engagement measure were reviewed by employment status across all three waves. Table 4.4 provides a breakdown of these differences over time. (See Table A.5 in Appendix G for a complete analysis of bivariate relationships between independent and variables and employment by wave). In Wave 1, there was a positive and significant relationship between each of the civic engagement variables and being employed, except between those who got together to fix a problem in their neighborhoods and those who did not. Wave 2 showed similar results, but in this wave there was not a significant relationship

<sup>39</sup> The unweighted analyses showed similar findings for financial help and overall civic engagement.

between those who spoke with a political official and those who did not. In Wave 3, there was a positive and significant relationship between each of the civic engagement variables and being employed, except for two variables: spoke with a political official and spoke with a religious leader. Across each wave, participation in volunteering, serving as an officer, giving financial help to family or friends, and participating in at least one civic engagement activity remained positive and significantly related to being employed. Therefore, significant differences exist between those who are civically engaged and those who are not, but only for certain forms of civic engagement.

**Table 4.4. Employment by Participation in Civic Engagement**

Variable		Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3	
		Employed	Not Employed	Employed	Not Employed	Employed	Not Employed
Volunteered in last 12 months	Yes	25%*	24%	28%***	25%	32%***	24%
	No	75%	76%	72%	75%	68%	76%
Served as an officer	Yes	9%**	10%	11%***	12%	12%***	10%
	No	91%	90%	89%	88%	88%	90%
Spoke with political official	Yes	14%***	17%	14%	15%	12%	12%
	No	86%	83%	86%	85%	88%	88%
Spoke with religious leader	Yes	11%***	14%	12%***	10%	10%	10%
	No	89%	86%	88%	90%	90%	90%
Got together to fix problem	Yes	22%	22%	24%	24%	19%*	19%
	No	78%	78%	76%	76%	81%	81%
Gave financial help	Yes	40%***	28%	40%***	26%	36%***	27%
	No	60%	72%	60%	74%	64%	73%
Overall civic engagement	Yes	63%***	56%	66%***	59%	62%***	54%
	No	37%	44%	34%	41%	38%	46%

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> All percentages were weighted.

<sup>2</sup> Significance based on weighted chi-square tests for independence.

\*p≤.05, \*\*p≤.01, \*\*\*p≤.001

While these bivariate analyses showed a basic, uncontrolled relationship between civic engagement and employment and income, to obtain a more complete understanding

of the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes, the analysis must control for other factors that affect employment outcomes in low-income households such as education, family structure, and public assistance receipt. Thus, the following analysis used multivariate fixed effects regression techniques to better understand the impact of different forms of civic engagement on employment over time.

### **Effects of Civic Engagement on Employment**

This section presents the results of the multivariate, fixed effects regression models, which tested the relationship between participation in civic engagement activities and employment statuses for low-income individuals in the United States. The fixed effects technique was appropriate for the analysis of the *Making Connections* panel data because it controlled for the correlation of data that occurs when analyzing repeated observations of the same units over time, in this case households. Given that participation in a civic act is likely related to unique, time-invariant characteristics of the household respondent which are easily measurable (e.g., education) as well as those that are more difficult to measure (e.g., pro-social behavior), the fixed effects analysis controlled for non-changing personal, household-level characteristics, which may influence participation in civic engagement and employment. As noted in Chapter 3, a Hausman test confirmed that fixed effects regression was preferred to random effects for analysis of the panel data and thus, only fixed effects results are presented in Table 4.5.<sup>40</sup> For each form of civic engagement, including the overall measure, one model is presented for a total of seven models in the following table.

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<sup>40</sup> Pooled ordinary least squares (OLS) and random effects regression were conducted and demonstrate similar impacts of civic engagement on employment. Given the panel nature of the data and the results of the Hausman test, only fixed effects are reported here. See Chapter 3 on methods for more details.

The findings presented in Table 4.5 revealed a positive and significant relationship between employment and two civic engagement measures: giving money to family or friends (financial help) and overall civic engagement. This means that if an individual from a low-income household went from not giving money to family or friends to giving money to family or friends, their odds of being employed were increased by 56% ( $p=.001$ ). In addition, if an individual from a low-income household went from not being civically engaged to being civically engaged, their odds of being employed increased by 31% ( $p=.053$ ). Dummy variables for Waves 2 and 3 provided comparisons with Wave 1 and neither was significant, but Wave 2 was positive and Wave 3 was negative.

Consistent with the literature, education and welfare receipt also had a significant effect on employment status. The results demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between going from a lower to higher education level and being employed. Going from no welfare receipt to becoming a welfare recipient resulted in a negative and significant relationship with being employed. Additionally, a negative relationship existed between going from not having a spouse to having a spouse in the housing unit and being employed. Going from having no children to children in a housing unit was positively related to being employed, except for volunteering (Model 1), serving as an officer (Model 2), and overall civic engagement (Model 7).

These findings demonstrated that two civic engagement measures, giving money to family or friends (financial help) and overall civic engagement, had a positive and significant effect on employment status. The next section reveals findings related to whether the same relationship exists when examining income over time.

**Table 4.5.** Odds ratios for civic engagement on employment (2002-2011)

Dependent Variable: Employment							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Independent Variable	Volunteering	Officer	Political	Religious	Together	Financial help	Overall civic engagement
Participation in type of civic engagement	1.173 (.176)	0.785 (.171)	0.797 (.146)	0.952 (.189)	0.936 (.141)	1.560** (.214)	1.313* (.185)
Education	1.856** (.371)	1.914** (.385)	1.859** (.371)	1.828** (.366)	1.881** (.375)	1.866** (.376)	1.825** (.371)
Spouse in housing unit	0.966 (.166)	0.964 (.166)	0.959 (.166)	0.967 (.167)	0.938 (.162)	0.908 (.158)	0.944 (.166)
Children in household	0.985 (.332)	0.986 (.331)	1.034 (.346)	1.014 (.337)	1.037 (.344)	1.082 (.363)	0.991 (.340)
Received TANF/Welfare	0.508*** (.074)	0.500*** (.072)	0.509*** (.074)	0.509*** (.074)	0.507*** (.074)	0.518*** (.076)	0.504*** (.074)
Wave 2	1.057 (.122)	1.051 (.122)	1.046 (.121)	1.065 (.124)	1.068 (.124)	1.069 (.125)	1.074 (.126)
Wave 3	0.929 (.108)	0.930 (.109)	0.910 (.107)	0.925 (.109)	0.928 (.109)	0.957 (.112)	0.930 (.110)
Observations	1,414	1,411	1,411	1,406	1,408	1,414	1,378
Groups	479	478	479	477	478	479	472

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

\*p≤.05, \*\*p≤.01, \*\*\*p≤.001

## The Relationship Between Civic Engagement and Income

Income is frequently used to examine economic mobility trends in the United States. Although most income mobility research focuses on a one or two decade time span (see Acs & Zimmerman, 2008; Auten & Gee, 2009), shorter time spans – such as five or seven years – have also been used to explore income mobility (Carroll, Joulfaian, & Rider, 2006). This section is focused on understanding the relationship between civic engagement and income during Waves 2 and 3, which spanned from 2005 to 2011.

To examine the relationship between the forms of civic engagement and income status over time, correlations were run. Civic engagement variables were significantly correlated with income in the sample, but only for four of the civic engagement variables (plus the overall measure) in both waves. As seen in Table 4.6, in Wave 2, each measure of civic engagement was significantly positively correlated with income except for serving as an officer (which was negative) and getting together to fix a problem (which was not significant). In Wave 3, all civic measures were significant and positively correlated with income.<sup>41</sup>

**Table 4.6.** Paired correlations between civic engagement and income

	Wave 2	Wave 3
Volunteered in last 12 months	0.046***	0.093***
Served as an officer	-0.008	0.117***
Spoke with political official	0.026***	0.057***
Spoke with religious leader	0.031***	0.060***
Got together to fix problem	0.005	0.057***
Gave financial help	0.196***	0.203***
Overall civic engagement	0.085***	0.133***

Note: Analyses were weighted.

\*p≤.05, \*\*p≤.01, \*\*\*p≤.001

<sup>41</sup> The unweighted analyses showed similar results.



To test whether group differences existed between those who are civically engaged and those who are not and their incomes over time, the six forms of engagement and overall civic engagement measure were reviewed by income status. Table 4.7 provides a breakdown of these differences over time. Across each of the civic measures and waves, those who were civically engaged had higher incomes than those who were not civically engaged. This relationship was positive and significant for all civic engagement variables except for those who got together to fix a problem in Wave 2.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 4.7. Mean income by participation in civic engagement**

Variable		Wave 2 Mean	Wave 3 Mean
Volunteered in last 12 months	Yes	\$17,710.00***	\$24,454.00***
	No	\$15,777.80	\$21,485.60
Served as an officer	Yes	\$17,693.40***	\$27,867.50***
	No	\$16,113.00	\$21,545.80
Spoke with political official	Yes	\$17,388.50***	\$25,444.50***
	No	\$16,067.10	\$21,741.70
Spoke with religious leader	Yes	\$17,464.00***	\$25,805.00***
	No	\$16,120.40	\$21,810.80
Got together to fix problem	Yes	\$16,282.70	\$23,632.20***
	No	\$16,291.00	\$21,802.30
Gave financial help	Yes	\$18,920.60***	\$27,546.60***
	No	\$14,978.70	\$19,945.80
Overall civic engagement	Yes	\$16,910.80***	\$24,160.10***
	No	\$15,197.30	\$19,623.30

Note: Significance based on t-tests (weighted).

\*p≤.05, \*\*p≤.01, \*\*\*p≤.001

<sup>42</sup> Chi-square tests were conducted to examine group differences across all three waves over a ten year period (2002-2011) using the categorical income variable in Appendix E. Findings from these tests confirmed those in in Table 4.6 in waves 2 and 3, and in wave 1 all civic engagement variables were significant except for two: served as an officer and spoke with a political official.

## Effects of Civic Engagement on Income

As with the employment variable, to obtain a more complete understanding of the relationship between civic engagement and income, the analysis controlled for other factors that influence income such as education, family structure, and public assistance receipt. This section presents a set of fixed effects regression models to better understand the impact of different types of civic engagement on income between 2005 and 2011.<sup>43</sup> Again, a Hausman test confirmed that fixed effects regression was preferred to random effects for analysis of the panel data.

For each of seven measures of civic engagement in this section, analyses were conducted with three measures of income for a total of 21 models in Table 4.8. For this analysis, models (8), (11), (14), (17), (20), (23), and (26) present the analysis with raw values of income. Models (9), (12), (15), (18), (21), (24), and (27) present the analysis with log of income. Finally, because larger families should require larger incomes, for the multivariate models household income was also converted to the natural log per capita (the log of the total household income divided by the number of people living in the household each year) (Bachtell, 2012). This can be interpreted as the income per person in thousands of dollars, and models (10), (13), (16), (19), (22), (25), and (28) present analyses with log per capita. All three models are presented in Table 4.8 to show robustness of results.

The findings from these analyses revealed the impact of one type of civic engagement as consistently positive and significant across all three measure of income:

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<sup>43</sup> Multivariate (fixed effects) tests were conducted to examine the effect of civic engagement on income across all three waves over a ten-year period (2002-2011) using the categorical income variable in Appendix E. The variable was treated as a continuous variable because each category differed by \$5,000. Findings from these tests confirmed those in in Table 4.8, as the only positive and significant civic engagement measure over the ten year period was giving money to family or friends.

giving money to family or friends. Using the raw income model (Model 23), going from not giving money to giving money over time was associated with a \$2,687 increase ( $p=.001$ ) in total household income. Model 24, which analyzed expected percent changes, revealed that going from not giving money to giving money to family or friends was expected to lead to a 24% increase in income ( $p=.011$ ). After adjusting for household size, Model 25 analyzing percent changes showed that going from not giving money to giving money was expected to lead to a 21% increase in income ( $p=.002$ ).

The results also showed that having a spouse in a housing unit increased household income, as households were able to pool together their income in the first two models. Table 4.8 showed that houses with spouses were expected to have up to \$7,214 (Model 11) more in income than their unmarried peers. However, adjusting for household size was associated with a decrease in income. As expected, the results also showed lower levels of income associated with receiving TANF/welfare, and households that received this form of government assistance were expected to have up to \$3,171 (Model 26) less in income than those who do not receive these benefits. Trends also revealed that over time, households did increase in income between Wave 2 and Wave 3.

**Table 4.8.** Fixed effects of civic engagement on income (2005-2011)

Variables	Volunteering				Officer			Political			Religious		
	(8)	(9)	(10)		(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)
Participation in type of civic engagement	-811.05 (906.78)	.036 (.102)	-.073 (.076)		474.42 (1,238.12)	-.059 (.141)	-.083 (.104)	-776.92 (1,059.12)	-.021 (.119)	-.133 (.089)	1,215.15 (1,168.64)	.045 (.132)	.025 (.098)
Education	625.33 (1,221.80)	-.034 (.137)	-.001 (.102)		600.45 (1,220.68)	-.032 (.139)	-.003 (.102)	629.93 (1,218.84)	-.030 (.137)	.003 (.102)	611.55 (1,222.19)	-.031 (.138)	-.002 (.103)
Spouse in housing unit	7,189.38*** (1,210.36)	.325** (.136)	-.580*** (.101)		7,214.80*** (1,204.95)	.326* (.138)	-.574*** (.101)	6,911.95*** (1,215.63)	.312* (.137)	-.577*** (.102)	7,071.71*** (1,218.33)	.319* (.137)	-.581*** (.102)
Children in household	261.78 (2,360.72)	.084 (.264)	-.874*** (.197)		275.57 (2,349.15)	.084 (.268)	-.882*** (.197)	515.76 (2,327.26)	.095 (.262)	-.868*** (.195)	709.60 (2,329.48)	.102 (.262)	-.854*** (.196)
Received TANF/ Welfare	-3,133.07*** (866.84)	-.301** (.097)	-.062 (.072)		-3,151.73*** (862.33)	-.271** (.098)	-.057 (.072)	-3,132.89*** (863.25)	-.271** (.097)	-.058 (.072)	-3,085.54*** (861.17)	-.269** (.097)	-.054 (.072)
Wave 3	5,596.08*** (473.54)	.251*** (.053)	.113** (.040)		5,548.40*** (472.03)	.260*** (.054)	.116** (.040)	5,499.78*** (474.88)	.249*** (.053)	.106** (.040)	5,613.99*** (473.66)	.254*** (.053)	.114** (.040)
Constant	14,374.85*** (2,028.28)	9,254*** (.227)	4,408*** (.169)		14,108.85*** (2,012.03)	9,256*** (.230)	4,398*** (.169)	14,189.22*** (2,001.17)	9,253*** (.225)	4,403*** (.168)	13,658.65*** (2,009.07)	9,235*** (.226)	4,37*** (.169)
Observations	2,119	2120	2,120		2,117	2,118	2,118	2,119	2,120	2,120	2,118	2,119	2,119
Groups	1,133	1,133	1,133		1,133	1,133	1,133	1,134	1,134	1,134	1,134	1,134	1,134
R-square	.224	.101	.580		.231	.097	.578	.228	.104	.576	.234	.105	.580

**Table 4.8.** Fixed effects of civic engagement on income (2005-2011) (*continued*)

Variables	Got Together			Financial help			Overall civic engagement		
	(20)	(21)	(22)	(23)	(24)	(25)	(26)	(27)	(28)
Participation in type of civic engagement	166.40 (883.66)	-.017 (.099)	-.054 (.074)	2,687.49** (829.091)	.240** (.094)	.213** (.069)	882.26 (834.85)	.023 (.093)	.037 (.069)
Education	610.72 (1,219.40)	-.030 (.137)	-.002 (.102)	522.85 (1,219.60)	-.037 (.138)	-.008 (.101)	526.41 (1,232.18)	-.038 (.138)	-.006 (.102)
Spouse in housing unit	6,973.29*** (1,211.52)	.312* (.136)	-.579*** (.101)	7,015.67*** (1,204.91)	.306* (.137)	-.593*** (.100)	7,011.70*** (1,223.94)	.318* (.137)	-.585*** (.102)
Children in household	571.63 (2,327.50)	.096 (.212)	-.860*** (.194)	823.06 (2,350.32)	.119 (.268)	-.846*** (.195)	262.12 (2,423.34)	.075 (.271)	-.904*** (.201)
Received TANF/ Welfare	-3,098.88*** (862.67)	-.271** (.097)	-.057 (.072)	-2,790.16** (864.45)	-.241** (.098)	-.029 (.071)	-3,171.31*** (869.65)	-.306** (.097)	-.065 (.072)
Wave 3	5,561.91*** (475.73)	.249*** (.053)	.105** (.040)	5,636.42*** (471.20)	.254*** (.054)	.123** (.039)	5,627.46*** (479.31)	.244*** (.054)	.112** (.040)
Constant	13,943.60*** (2,013.64)	9.254*** (.227)	4.392*** (.168)	12,768.09*** (2,037.08)	9.134*** (.232)	4.280*** (.169)	13,730.70*** (2,164.22)	9.271*** (.242)	4.397*** (.180)
Observations	2,117	2,118	2,118	2,119	2,120	2,120	2,093	2,094	2,094
Groups	1,133	1,133	1,133	1,132	1,132	1,132	1,129	1,129	1,129
R-square	.231	.104	.580	.251	.116	.561	.233	.101	.591

## Summary and Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the quantitative study sample, highlighted civic engagement trends among individuals living in low-income households, and presented findings suggesting significant relationships between participation in civic acts and two economic outcomes: employment and income. Correlations suggested a significant relationship between four forms of civic engagement and employment across all three waves of the *Making Connections* survey, including volunteering, serving as an officer, giving money to family or friends, and overall civic engagement. Five forms of civic engagement – volunteering, speaking with a political official, speaking with a religious officer, giving money to family or friends, and overall civic engagement – were significantly related to income in Waves 2 and 3. Additional bivariate analyses revealed differences in both employment and income across all waves of the survey between those who were civically engaged and those who were not.

While these bivariate findings were not unexpected given what is known about employment and income as factors that increase the likelihood of civic participation, this chapter used multivariate fixed effects regression techniques to reverse the traditional direction of this relationship and instead examined the effects of civic engagement on employment and income. In doing so, findings suggested two significant outcomes. First, fixed-effects models revealed that participation in at least one civic engagement activity had a positive and significant effect on employment for low-income individuals over time. Second, the models revealed that giving money to family or friends had a positive and significant effect on one's employment and income status over time.

These findings lend support for hypothesis 1, providing some evidence that participation in civic engagement had a positive and significant effect on economic outcomes for low-income individuals over time. However, the findings only lend partial support for hypothesis 2. While the results showed that giving money to family or friends was the most significant factor contributing to the two economic outcomes explored in this chapter, the survey data cannot provide in-depth insight into what might explain this relationship. Given features of social capital such as trust and norms of reciprocity, it would be theoretically sound to expect, for example, an association between giving money to family or friends and receiving money from family or friends. While chi-square analyses from the *Making Connections* data did suggest a significant association across each survey wave between those respondents who gave money to and received money from family or friends,<sup>44</sup> this relationship did not uncover how and under what conditions this relationship took place. Thus, through the voices of low-income individuals themselves, the next two chapters begin to address how social and human capital assets are accessed during civic engagement.

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<sup>44</sup> Each of the (weighted) bivariate relationships between the two variables were significant at  $p=0.000$ . Wave 1 ( $\chi^2=972.75$ ,  $df=1$ ). Wave 2 ( $\chi^2=320.35$ ,  $df=1$ ). Wave 3 ( $\chi^2=108.40$ ,  $df=1$ ).

## **Chapter 5. Civic Engagement: A Point of Access for Social Capital and Human Capital**

### **Overview**

The previous chapter revealed a positive and significant relationship between low-income individuals who were civically engaged in certain activities and economic outcomes over time. While the data demonstrated that a relationship was present, the analysis has yet to explore what might explain this relationship. Previous literature suggests participation in civic activities can provide exposure to social capital and human capital, which are assets regularly cited in the literature as positively influencing economic outcomes such as employment and income. However, little is known about *how* these assets are accessed and accrued while participating in a civic act, particularly for a population that regularly faces institutional, structural, and economic barriers to participation.

This chapter aims to explain the ways participation in civic engagement provides access to social and human capital for low-income individuals. A qualitative analysis guided by grounded theory is presented to answer research question 2:

**Research Question 2:** How does participation in civic engagement provide access to social and human capital assets for low-income individuals?

In interviews with 31 low-income individuals living in one of the *Making Connections* cities – Providence, RI – participants revealed the ways they accessed



social and human capital assets while being civically engaged in their communities. Study participants described the ways civic engagement provided access to social resources and broadened their social network, and the conditions under which bridging and bonding social capital occurred. Participants also described the variety of ways they developed of both hard and soft skills, both through hands-on and formal learning, as well opportunities to build on existing skills and knowledge. Together, the conditions of the civic engagement activity as well as external factors influenced access to social and human capital.

This chapter begins with a description of the ways participants mentioned being civically engaged in their communities. Next, the chapter presents findings on how civic engagement provided access to social capital, revealing themes related to broadened social networks, bonding social capital, and bridging social capital. Findings related to accessing human capital assets are then presented to reveal themes related to accessing and building skills and knowledge. The final section of this chapter presents the ways civic engagement simultaneously provided access to both social and human capital assets.

### **Forms of Civic Engagement**

Civic engagement is defined broadly in this study as individual or collective actions that address issues of public concern or unmet needs, and are intended to improve or influence a community (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Carpini, 2004; Levine, 2014). To understand the ways study participants were civically engaged, participants were asked an open-ended question about the ways they were involved in their communities. In addition to these types of civic engagement, a priori categories were derived from the literature on civic engagement among low-income individuals and the civic engagement

categories examined in Chapter 4. This section outlines the categories of civic engagement most commonly described in response to the open-ended and a priori questions about civic engagement.

**A priori and emergent civic engagement categories.** Table 5.1 defines the categories (**bolded**) and summarizes the number and percentage of participants in each civic engagement category. As the table shows, six of the seven categories were a priori categories, and some a priori categories became examples of a broader civic engagement category. For instance, within the community organizing category, the a priori code collective action became an example of an act of civic engagement. Participants in this sample most frequently mentioned civic engagement through volunteering, followed by informal engagement, and political action or advocacy. For many respondents, their involvement in one type of civic engagement overlapped with another. For instance, organizing around a particular bill could be seen as either a type of community organizing or political action.

The interviews also yielded data on why and how participants got involved in these particular forms of civic engagement, how long they have been involved in these civic acts, and barriers to participation in civic activities.<sup>45</sup> The types of civic engagement low-income individuals had access to were inextricably linked to their opportunities to access and accrue social and human capital within a civic engagement activity.

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<sup>45</sup> While this information is not fully presented here due to space constraints, some of these data will be presented throughout the following sections in the context of social capital and human capital. The information in this section serves as a backdrop for the following section, which presents findings on the ways civic engagement provided access to social and human capital assets for low-income individuals.

**Table 5.1.** Number and percentage of participants in each civic engagement category: A priori themes in *italic*

Type of Civic Engagement (Definition)	Participants (N=31)	Percent
<b>Community organizing</b> Part of organized grassroots, faith-based, broad-based, and coalition building efforts toward a shared interest. Examples included alliance building, canvassing, <i>collective action</i> , direct action, door knocking, or forming an alliance.	12	39%
<b>Education or school involvement</b> Engaged in activities involving an educational institution. Examples included being involved a child's elementary school classroom or collaborating with a higher education institution.	10	32%
<b>Giving money</b> Gave money to a formal organization, informal organization, or individual. Examples included giving money to a church, family member, or community member.	12	39%
<b>Informal engagement</b> Participated in informal acts intended to improve or influence the community. Examples included caring for older adults in a neighborhood, in-kind donations, housing homeless individuals, providing transportation, and watching children in a public housing community.	17	55%
<b>Political action or advocacy</b> Involved in efforts related to governmental institutions or processes to influence political, economic, and social systems. Examples included campaigning, engaging with political officials, lobbying, or organizing around a bill.	13	42%
<b>Religious participation</b> Active in a religious organization. Examples included driving the church van or involvement in a church choir.	12	39%
<b>Volunteering</b> Served as a volunteer of a formal organization. Examples included volunteering at a food bank, as a basketball coach, or as an AmeriCorps volunteer, as well as serving as the leader of an organization as a board member, committee chair, or <i>officer</i> .	31	100%

Note: Participants were asked an open-ended question: to describe all of the ways they were involved in their community. In this sample, 97% of participants (N=30) were engaged in more than one type of civic engagement.

## Access to Social Capital Assets through Civic Engagement

“It’s not necessarily what you know, it’s who you know.”  
– Megan, 31-year-old volunteer, activist, and community leader

When discussing their civic engagement, participants described their experiences accessing social networks, resources, and connections. This section includes an overview of the ways social capital emerged as a theme from the data, followed by a detailed analysis of the major aspects of social capital in this study.

**Overview of social capital.** Participants were asked questions about social capital during their participation in a variety of civic engagement activities, and these questions were informed by 12 a priori themes. Additionally, ten emergent themes added depth and dimension to these a priori themes and also added new categories of social capital. Table 5.2 includes a list of social capital codes that were used in this analysis. In some cases, a priori themes translated into broad categories, from which sub-themes arose.

**Table 5.2.** Social capital categories and themes: A priori categories and themes in *italic*

Social capital categories and themes	Subthemes
<i>Social capital goals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meet new people</li><li>• Sense of purpose</li></ul>
<i>Broadened social network</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Individual networks</i></li><li>• <i>Organizational networks</i></li><li>• Entry point to a network</li></ul>
<i>Bonding social capital</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Trust</i></li><li>• <i>Norms of reciprocity</i></li><li>• Like a family</li><li>• Structured opportunities</li><li>• Shared experiences</li></ul>
<i>Bridging social capital</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social status/class</li><li>• Race/ethnicity</li><li>• Across organizations</li></ul>
<i>Social capital challenges</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Lack of interaction</i></li><li>• Cliques</li><li>• <i>Discrimination</i></li><li>• <i>Hardships</i></li><li>• <i>Structural barriers</i></li></ul>

As the discussion will make clear, these themes did not exist in silos, but instead were interconnected. For instance, several forms of volunteering offered opportunities to meet new people from other organizations. This, in turn, led the volunteer to other organizations. Through this expanded network, the volunteer used an individual from a partner organization as a reference for a job. In this way, the social capital themes were closely interrelated.

**Findings on social capital.** The following section includes an examination of the major social capital themes related to how participation in civic engagement provides access to social capital assets for low-income individuals. Participants emphasized the different ways social capital was made available to them through their civic experiences, with many of these social capital outcomes overlapping. This section examines the data on the key themes and sub-themes in this area.

***Broadened social network.*** All 31 participants emphasized the ways civic engagement provided them with access to a larger network of social resources. For most participants, their civic engagement experience offered opportunities to expand their existing networks. For others, their participation in civic activities was the first time they ever had access to a social network of “positive” social capital during adulthood. This section describes the ways participants perceived their social networks being broadened through participation in civic engagement.

***Expanded individual and organizational networks.*** Participants mentioned ways they were able to expand their network of social actors and ties both at the individual and organizational levels. Participants reported that networks were broadened through: regular contact with individuals within organizations, collaboration on a project or

campaign with another person, introductions to those outside of the civic network, involvement with multiple organizations or groups, and participation in an alliance, coalition, or collaborative in the community.

Nearly all study participants (30 of 31) mentioned being involved in more than one type of civic activity. For instance, 43-year-old Anthony<sup>46</sup> volunteered as an adult educator for two nonprofit organizations, and also served as an activist. He volunteered his time teaching and mentoring youth at a church, leading discussions on African American and Black Studies at a nonprofit organization, and serving as a basketball coach. He explained how his social network expanded as he met more people and learned about other organizations:

My social community has expanded because I'm in contact with a lot more activists. So I have a lot more friends. At the church, you kind of see the same people all the time. And you do here, too; but because you're working, and constantly working in collaboration with other organizations, you meet more people that way. You find out about projects that people are working on; or you start working on a project yourself, and so you start to do outreach. And in the midst of the outreach, you're also meeting more people via the outreach. So organizing constantly has you in a situation where you're expanding the ways in which you meet people.

For Anthony, the act of organizing itself provided access to new networks and opportunities to meet people. His social network was naturally extended through his involvement with multiple organizations.

Participants with access to multiple civic networks also described the ways that their different networks provided access to different forms of social capital. For example, 32-year-old Megan was involved with several types of civic activities in the community, ranging from volunteer work with young professionals to community organizing. She

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<sup>46</sup> All participants' names, organization names, and identifying details were changed to protect their identities. All names used are pseudonyms.

described each of her civic social networks as “very different” in the ways they provided access to different people or groups for different needs:

Working with the Organization for Young Professionals I’ve dealt with a lot more of the business community where it was anything from a TV anchor or reporter through people that work for the government in all different capacities all the way through people that are just – they call them street workers at this one location but they assist in helping nonviolent initiatives. So I mean there’s a little bit that I take from every single thing, right.

For Megan and 29 other study participants, access to multiple networks provided opportunities to access different types of social capital when necessary.

*Civic engagement as an entry point to a social network.* Several study participants mentioned that civic engagement served as their first access point to a social network as adults. These participants cited their civic work as a place where they formed connections, socialized, and overcame isolation. For 55-year-old Charles, who was formerly incarcerated, access to social networks through his volunteer work also helped him feel less isolated. “At first, I was isolated, being in prison for half of your life, you didn’t have the gentle side; you couldn’t dare show that...I think other people showed me along the way you can just be yourself.”

Similarly, for Rebecca, a 31-year-old AmeriCorps case management volunteer at an organization targeting the reduction of gang or group-related violence, civic engagement also brought her out of isolation. While she was involved in the community through her kids’ school and activities at church, Rebecca spent most of her life feeling isolated as a stay at home mother. When the father of her children left the family’s home, she needed an additional source of income. She initially heard about her AmeriCorps volunteer site several years ago when the organization reached out to her family when her brother was shot. Knowing they were an organization she could trust, she applied to be an

AmeriCorps volunteer. The AmeriCorps opportunity provided her with a stipend in return for a year of service. She said, “Before I was in AmeriCorps, I would basically isolate myself, and just be me and my kids. And we would go to church; but I didn't really socialize too much. So I got to open up.” The AmeriCorps opportunity gave Rebecca an opportunity to interact with others in a meaningful way.

Study participants without prior social networks also mentioned that participation in civic activities taught them about the importance of connections. Jenny, a 37-year old woman who lived in a homeless shelter, volunteered at a technology organization as a part of her shelter’s jobs program. She cited her volunteer experience as the first place she developed a social network. During the interview, she mentioned that she did not realize the importance of connections and was “learning a lot about connections” through her volunteer work. When asked specifically what she learned about connections, she stated, “That you need them. That nobody’s just come up to you and be like, wow, you’re so awesome.” Access to knowledge about the importance of social networks coupled with the opportunity to expand her network through a volunteer program provided an entry point for Jenny to access social capital.

***Bonding social capital.*** While civic engagement provided access to a larger network for all study participants, several study participants noted that developing a social relationship did not necessarily constitute a strong social connection. For example, Rebecca explained that as a volunteer in her daughter’s classroom she developed relationships with other parents. She stated, “I meet different types of people. Like we go out to even have dinners and stuff. But we don’t connect.” Through this statement, Rebecca suggested that although she had access to this network, she did not feel close to



the individuals in the network. This section examines the ways study participants became connected or “bonded” to others in their civic networks, known as bonding social capital.

Bonding social capital emerged as a theme as study participants described the ways they strengthened relationships and ties with others in the same civic organization or network. Over half of study participants (25 of 31) mentioned ways that their civic engagement experiences provided opportunities to bond social capital through building trust and norms of reciprocity. Participants also shared how their involvement in civic groups and organizations provided access to others with shared experiences, which strengthened relationships. Although bonding social capital occurred organically for some study participants, others were a part of structured opportunities that facilitated bonding social capital.

*Trust and norms of reciprocity.* Trust was a prominent sub-theme that emerged during discussions of bonding social capital within civic organizations. Participants regularly mentioned ways trust was developed through interactions with others who were willing to help with family, health, or financial issues. For instance, Roger, a 47-year-old man who volunteered at his church and also served food to people at a church meal site, described how his decision to ask “a selected few” for money was undergirded by a sense of trust:

People that I trust is the church people, people at church. You can't trust too many people that come in and out of here because everybody has an angle, looking for their fix either of drugs or alcohol and you can't trust people who have those addiction problems. But I would say maybe a selected few that I would go to if I needed something, like maybe 20 bucks. Oh, I've done it many times. Reverend Angela, I need \$20 to hold me till I get my check next week. Here you go, Roger. You know what I mean? I've done it with Brian once or twice. I did it with Sister Claire.

Similarly, Carol – who volunteered at the same church meal site for over five years – stated that when she borrows money from fellow volunteers, “trust is a big thing.” As a recovering alcoholic, Carol noted that:

They [the meal site] know I’m not gonna use it for alcohol and that I’m really gonna need it. If people give me a loan, they could say yeah, well I’m never gonna see that again. But now, they trust me to pay it back, and I always do.

Because the meal site created conditions for trust to be developed among volunteers, both Carol and Roger knew they could turn to others in the organization for financial support in the present or the future.

Trust was also built when participants could confide in others within a civic organization during a difficult time. Over half (16 of 31) of study participants mentioned ways trusting relationships were developed when they encountered the death of a family member, a domestic abuse situation, drug addiction, unemployment, or mental health issues. Access to individuals within organizations and institutions helped to facilitate bonding social capital for participants. Pam was a 51-year-old community organizer who was also an active member and leader in her church for over a decade. She shared how she turned to members of her church when she had a nervous breakdown and when her house caught on fire:

Not too many people know I had a nervous breakdown. Yet those who knew, in my church, never spoke a word to anyone else, until I got up and spoke about it. They’re looking around and like you? I’m like yeah, it happens to the best of us. That’s when you know who you can trust because no one said anything to anybody. The ones that I had spoken to, they said I’m gonna keep you up in prayers, Sis, and that was it. I knew they did when I – that was a big help. My house caught on fire one year, and my church family found out. It was like what do you need? Where are you staying? We’re gonna take a collection. We’re gonna make sure your kids got this. I did not go without. Me and my four kids and my ex-husband, we didn’t go without.

Additionally, study participants who were involved in a civic activity for an extended period of time mentioned trust more frequently than participants who had

shorter interactions with a civic activity. Consistent with the social capital literature, trust took time to develop, but ultimately mediated the social benefits yielded to study participants (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). For instance, Megan explained that the time she invested in an organization helped to establish trust among her fellow volunteers and resulted in a future leadership position on the executive committee of the organization:

So the groups that I named, all of the groups there, are the ones that I actually trust, it took a little while to gain everybody's trust. I've built some excellent relationships with them. I can say there's very minimal things where I have to look at them twice about – of course you have to be careful because I've learned especially with last year doing some volunteer efforts where everybody was just for themselves and one person wanted to cut off the next and that's just not the way that I work. So I mean the boards, although those boards were relatively new, I was already volunteering for them anyway prior to getting on their executive committees. But at the same time though too, I mean as I've gotten to know all these groups more and more and being trusted with a lot of stuff that they throw my way, I come across some really great people, some great honest people that want to do the right thing but just need some help as to how to go about it.

By serving as a volunteer before obtaining a leadership position within the organization, Megan was able to establish a foundation of mutual trust with others in the organization.

Norms of reciprocity, or the expectation that a person's actions will be repaid by others, was a sub-theme frequently mentioned alongside trust. Participants described ways mutual benefits were provided through encouragement, support, and shared experiences within their civic work. Colleen, a 55-year-old woman who founded a social justice organization and volunteered for dozens of organizations in the community for over 20 years, explained:

People that I worked with have helped me personally because once we develop a trust system; I know that I can count on them. I can count on them for either friendship or resources and going through stuff. And professionally, it's just like we can work together to build together.

*"It's like a family."* Several participants described others in their civic networks as "like a second family" (Roger). This sub-theme was particularly prominent among

participants involved in church and other long-term civic activities. Barb, a 50-year-old woman who volunteered for a grassroots organization for over ten years, described those she volunteered with as “like an extended family.” She explained, “If you go and talk about something at home, you can come here, and talk and feel better, like say when you went home.”

Similarly, Walter, the oldest study participant at age 68, became a volunteer at a church affiliate that provided free meals to the community after first being a recipient of the organization’s services. Several years ago when he was eating a meal there, someone asked him to help with something in the kitchen, and he has been volunteering there for over a decade. Walter described why he thinks of the people he volunteers with as like a family:

It’s just meeting these people and working here has just changed my life. ‘Cause like I said I’d been in the street, drinking and probably drugging 24/7, hanging out with the fellas. It’s like a family. They accept me for what I am, and it’s just fabulous. I’ve never met people like this before.

For Barb and Walter, civic networks served as additional access points for social support in their lives.

*Structured opportunities to strengthen connections.* While bonding social capital occurred organically over time for several participants, 13 of 31 participants mentioned ways opportunities were structured to facilitate social capital. Specifically, participants mentioned access to a mentor or sponsor, organized programs or activities, and “safe spaces” for conversations as the primary types of structured opportunities. For instance, Pam described the ways her organization provided space for individuals to share their feelings with one another:

When we come and we speak about – in our meeting, we introduce – everybody introduces their self, and they say how they’re feeling at that time. You might get

someone that's not feeling too good. We all stop and we tell – we try to encourage one another. That's the big thing. We do encourage one another.

Similarly, Luis, a 20-year-old volunteer at a community arts center, described the ways the center structured introductions and interactions with others in a way that made him feel comfortable approaching others with his issues:

We introduce ourselves in case there's anybody new and what we have on our mind and what we're doing. So then that happens up just let everybody know what's going on. It doesn't have to be in general and all that but let's say if we have an issue we'll tell someone, pull them to the side and say, oh, I'm having an issue here or there, I work with this, so can you point me to where I need to go and it usually turns out well. I had so much going on in high school. I guess, well, the last few years of high school wasn't really, it was kind of rough, so I needed someone to talk to here and there and I was able to do that, talk to someone.

Other participants, primarily those under the age of 30, mentioned that structured mentorship opportunities provided an opportunity to strengthen a connection with a caring adult. For instance, Steven, an 18-year-old volunteer in an organization dedicated to reducing gang violence, described the way an AmeriCorps volunteer in the organization, Andre, served as a mentor for him:

Like Andre really pushed me to really be a part of my community and do well and not just like negative things, positive. Over time, well now he's like my best friend, all right? Yeah. First he was like – he was a cool guy, you know, 'cause I'm quiet, I really don't – I'm not really the type to say hi first for example and – but, yeah. He's a street worker and when I was really on the wrong path, he put me on the right path. He's the main person who really helps me and stuff like that but all the stuff if I get in trouble or anything like that.

Luis and Steven, two young men who did not complete high school, were representative of the nine million “at risk” youth in the United States who never had an adult mentor of any kind (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014). However, structured opportunities within their civic activities provided access to caring adults and peers who provided support during their transition from youth to adulthood.

Access to organized events, activities, and programs also facilitated bonding social capital. For instance, Maya, a 20-year-old community organizer and volunteer, described the ways a community organizing leadership institute helped her become close with people that she organizes with:

When I first started getting involved with Ground Up (GU) like the GU class was the first actual thing that I did to closer to people at GU and at first I was very quiet and just observing things, feeling things out and then after a while, they seen me come out my shell and I – to them I blossomed but to my mom it was always me. And so they see the difference from before when I just used to be like real quiet and say what I have to say and that's it. But now I'm – I joke around and playing with everybody. And I guess to them it's like, "Oh, wow, she's a really nice person." But, yeah, it was a challenge at first because I didn't know anybody and I didn't want to get too comfortable before my time.

Without this formal opportunity to engage with others, Maya may have continued to feel isolated within the organization. Instead, through the organized institute, she “blossomed” and became closer to people within GU.

*Challenges to bonding social capital.* However, opportunities to bond social capital were not present within all civic engagement opportunities. Participants cited examples of mistrust, cliques, and lack of opportunities to engage with others as challenges associated with getting to know others in a civic activity. For instance, Rosa, a 41-year-old woman who described herself as a political activist and an AmeriCorps volunteer, did not have much interaction with others in her AmeriCorps role. She explained: “I mean just because where I am it's me by myself and then our team, everybody is pretty much dispersed. So I don't know if I would be able to develop a relationship with them and carry it through.”

*Bridging social capital.* In addition to bonding social capital, participants established ties with diverse individuals across networks, known as bridging social capital (Putnam, 1993). Over half of study participants (21 of 31) described ways that

their civic engagement experiences provided opportunities to bridge relationships across class and race lines, as well as across different types of organizations. Individuals also discussed the ways their civic experiences presented challenges for bridging social capital to occur.

*Bridging across social status/class and race/ethnicity.* Participants in the study sample, particularly those involved in community organizing and political work, noted the ways they were “linked” (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004) to individuals with a different social status, such as politicians, superintendents, and professors. Rebecca stated, “I met people that I would never think I would meet. Especially when we had our Christmas party – a lot of politicians and people were here – the commissioners, everything.”

Similarly, Pam explained how her community organizing networks influenced her social status at church:

When I go to church, I can speak about who I have met, compared to when – before I got involved with Organizing Inc. even having a luncheon with someone that’s a senator – like Senator Kan, I talk to him all the time. But I couldn’t go and say to my church we need to pray for him. Just me mentioning his name, they’re like wow, you’re growing. People see a difference in the way I’m growing to the way I used to be. I was just someone who did my job, and that was it. I didn’t hang around. I didn’t wanna speak to other people. But now, I’m more involved, and I wanna help other people, and I try to get them involved. We do have a few people in our church who was going through, who I was able to make a couple of phone calls and let them speak directly to the person. ‘Cause I don’t wanna be that – I like them to get it directly from the person instead of secondhand word, because I’m not gonna say it the way that you’re telling me, so I’d rather for them to get it straight from the horse’s mouth. I usually do a lot of that, so that helps out.

Thus, Pam’s community organizing work not only introduced her to politicians and other influential members of the community, but also influenced her ability to bridge her community organizing network with her church community and help others.

While bridging relationships across class lines was challenging for some participants, others noted the powerful effects of a long-term relationship with an

influential member of the community. Study participants who were community organizers described the ways their relationships with those in positions of power – particularly lawmakers – were strengthened over time. For instance, Richard, a 61-year-old community organizer, was responsible for leading efforts related to a housing bill. He described how his relationship with politicians would be stronger and more effective this year since he was no longer the “new guy”:

At the State House for example, I’ve met some of the representatives and the senators, and we have sat. We have talked. Some of them genuinely like this bill. They really want to – they’re really trying to help us push it through. It’s always a stumbling block along the way. Of course, I won’t mention any names. So it’s just block along the way. But when you – okay, like I’ve made friends down there at the State House, where – okay, last session. I was a new guy. But I was seeing a lot. So this year, I’ve got friends that I can go to and say, “Hey, we’re back again. We’re going to try this way here, and we’re going to leave it. We can’t compromise anymore. This is what we have to go with. Anything else is not going to be a help to no one. So this is what we have to go with. We’re hoping that you will push for us with this bill, again this year.

However, many participants recognized that their access to bridged social resources across class lines only had value in certain contexts. For instance, Helen, a 58-year-old woman who was president of both a housing tenant association and the board of directors of a direct action organization, described the differences in her interactions with politicians when she wore her “organizer hat” and when she did not:

Yeah because I had the opportunity to go to the State House and meet the Senators and Reps, where I could see the Senators and Reps right on the street and they will act like they don’t know me. But when I’m in the State House, it’s, “Hi. How are you doing?”

Through this example, Helen demonstrated her bridged social resources with local politicians were only valuable when she was in the State House; her social resources were neither effective nor activated when she walked down the street.

Participants also mentioned ways civic engagement provided opportunities to interact with people of different races and ethnicities. Michael, a 22-year-old who



identified as African American, described the ways his volunteer work at a local arts organization introduced him to people of different races and classes. He explained, “Well, I met different type of people because I was around in my neighborhood, you know, see a lot of, you know, white, middle-class people. You don’t interact with them like that. That’s just how it is for some reason.” Michael’s volunteer role provided him with a place to engage with white middle-class people, who he did interact with in his neighborhood.

In addition, all 12 of the community organizers in the sample described how a single issue in the community often brought people of different races and ethnicities together. According to Rosa, “Being an activist, it’s like it doesn’t matter anything. It doesn’t matter what background a person has. We’re people trying to get together to do something and find solutions to different problems.” Similarly, Judy, who identified as a Native American, black woman, and political activist, explained how her involvement in youth issues allowed her to work alongside people of different races and ethnicities:

One of the things I like about it [political activism] is that you have to be a people person and you meet a lot of different people from all walks of life. I never really imagined that I would be an advocate for Cambodian people or Asian folks, but we’re affiliated with YOM. And that stands for the Youth Organizing Movement, YOM. And it’s the Asian group there and we go to a lot of their things that they have, and we support them.

In addition, Richard, who identified as black, was introduced to people of different races and ethnicities through his community organizing work. Richard recognized that different types of people were important to meet because all of the issues are affecting people of all races and ethnicities. He said:

I’ve met a lot of different people. Surprisingly to me, I’ve met a lot of people from the Latin community, also. They’re people just like we are. They want the same things that we want. As a result, they’re going through the same problems that we are. So the community as a whole is, like I said, it’s not just black people.

It's all people, especially low-income people that need this help, and they should come here. They should rally with us.

Thus, civic engagement served as a natural bridge across races and ethnicities when individuals came together to address specific issues in the community; in these contexts, the focus became the issues, and not differences between groups.

*Bridging across organizations.* Civic engagement provided study participants with opportunities to meet people from other organizations or groups, which broadened networks and strengthened camaraderie in the community. Participants mentioned coalition building, national networks, and travel outside of their local community as the primary ways they bridged social capital across organizations.

Participants regularly mentioned bridged social capital as a result of being a part of a coalition or alliance. For instance, Richard created a coalition for a fair housing bill he was working to get passed. Through this coalition he was introduced to others from local nonprofit organizations with similar missions. He explained:

This year, the thing that I have taken on to do differently is I have created a fair housing coalition. What that is, that was me bringing together other nonprofit organizations that will support – that have supported us in the past. We've been to hearings at the State House, both in the Senate and at the House of Representatives. Not to my knowledge, but last year was my first time doing this, and we had other organizations speaking in favor of this bill. So I thought, what would be better than, to have all of these organizations to come together as a coalition.

Thus, Richard's political strategy resulted in access to bridged social resources and networks.

Other participants mentioned the ways national networks facilitated learning and built connections. Don, a 45-year-old a part-time executive director of a grassroots community organization, was also active in dozens of different social justice campaigns in the community. He described the ways access to a national network provided him with

opportunities to not only meet different people, but also strengthen morale within his own organization. He said:

We have these national networks with Justice Inc. and Equality First. Those are always amazing. It's like they're in the same exact boat as you are, but they're also much more vibrant. Like I feel like I'm jaded a little bit and these folks are just like it's just like the way they talk and everything they say is just like on point or really positive and really vibrant. That makes me a little jealous but I'm also like wow, that's amazing. And they're doing great work. They're changing a lot of stuff and getting a lot of people involved and doing a lot of education and mobilizing people.

Another way participants mentioned bridging social capital was through opportunities to travel and interact with members from other communities. For instance, Judy traveled from Providence to San Francisco where she met people from “other organizations that are doing similar work to what we're doing.” However, not all organizations offered equal opportunities for bridging social capital through travel. For Pam, although all of her organizations provided access to similar types of people, the organizations varied in the opportunities they provided to branch out and meet other people. When contrasting her experiences at Organizing Inc. with her church, she explained, “they're not quite different. It's just that with Organizing Inc., I travel more. At the church, I don't do a lot of traveling, but we still meet a lot of people.” She mentioned that her church used to do more traveling, but the church got too big. She said, “We have about 300 members now. So we talk about when we had 50 members, it was easier for us all to pick up and say okay, we're gonna go to Washington. But now, it's a little harder.” Therefore, the church no longer had the capacity to offer opportunities for travel, while the community organization group did.

*Structural barriers to bridging social capital.* Participants mentioned structural factors that impeded their opportunities to bridge social capital. Ten of the 31 participants

mentioned challenges associated with social aspects of their pasts that followed them into their futures, such as involvement with drugs or a previous affiliation with a gang. For example, Steven mentioned that his previous gang activity influenced which parts of town he could go to as a volunteer. When explaining why he tried to stay away from an organization on the other side of town, he explained:

I used to be involved in a gang before and I still have people out there who really think I still – I'm still involved. So I – not that I care or anything like that. I get the point across that I'm not but, you know, there's still people out there.

Other participants cited examples of discrimination they faced related to race or ethnicity, class, and/or religion, which influenced opportunities to bridge social capital. For instance, Maya identified as a Muslim and wore a headdress. One day, when she went to canvass at homes scheduled for foreclosure, the woman who answered the door assumed Maya was visiting her home for religious reasons and would not listen to Maya. Since this experience, Maya mentioned that she no longer preferred to canvass, and instead would rather contact people about these issues over the phone. She explained, “If I’m going to do something, I’d rather do it over the phone ‘cause they can’t tell what I look like.” Although Maya had access to opportunities to engage with others and bridge social capital, discrimination ultimately influenced the ways she prefers to interact with people.

### **Access to Human Capital Assets through Civic Engagement**

“When I came in, I wanted to do something with my community. I wound up learning new skills.”  
– *Phil, 61-year-old political activist, lifelong community organizer*

Throughout the interviews, participants described their experiences accessing and accruing skills, knowledge, and other human capital assets. A wide range of human

capital areas emerged from these data, including 10 a priori themes and an additional 19 emergent themes. This section includes an overview of the ways human capital emerged as a theme from the data, followed by a detailed analysis of the major aspects of human capital in this study.

**Overview of human capital.** Participants were asked about access to human capital during their participation in a variety of civic engagement activities. Additionally, emergent themes added depth and dimension to these a priori themes and also added new human capital categories and themes. Table 5.3 includes a list of human capital codes that were used in this analysis. In some cases, a priori themes translated into broad categories, from which sub-themes arose.

**Table 5.3.** Human capital categories and themes: A priori categories and themes in *italics*

Human capital categories and themes	Subthemes
<i>Goals to develop new skills, knowledge, or resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Came in with goal</li> <li>• Developed goal over time</li> <li>• Access to resources</li> </ul>
<i>Acquisition of hard and soft skills</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Speaking</li> <li>• <i>Writing</i> (Grants)</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• <i>Communication</i></li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Patience</li> </ul>
<i>Strengthened hard and soft skills</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill alignment</li> </ul>
<i>Existing skills and knowledge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with goals</li> <li>• <i>Alignment with interests</i></li> <li>• Alignment with issue-area</li> <li>• <i>Leveraging existing assets</i></li> <li>• <i>Previous work experiences</i></li> </ul>
Training/learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hands-on</li> <li>• Informal</li> <li>• Mentor</li> <li>• Ownership over work</li> <li>• Role</li> <li>• Shadowing</li> </ul>
<i>Challenges</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity of civic experience</li> <li>• Structural barriers</li> </ul>

As noted in the previous section on social capital, the human capital themes were interrelated. For instance, community organizing provided access to both hard and soft skills, which were learned from a mentor through shadowing. These skills aligned with the goals of the individual in relation to future employment. In this way, human capital themes are closely interconnected.

**Findings on human capital.** The following section includes an examination of the major human capital themes related to the ways participation in civic engagement provided access to human capital assets for low-income individuals. Participants emphasized the different ways human capital was accessed through their civic experiences, with many of these human capital themes overlapping. This section examines the data on the key themes and sub-themes in this area.

***Goals to develop skills and knowledge.*** In this study, only six participants had goals to obtain new skillsets or knowledge before they became involved with a civic activity, but ten participants mentioned that they developed goals to learn new things after being exposed to the civic activity. The six participants expressed an interest in learning new skills, specifically to strengthen communication and writing skills to improve their job prospects. For instance, Tracy was involved in several civic activities over the years as a community organizer, an AmeriCorps volunteer, and a co-founder of a program that used art to address the community's economic and social issues. Through her civic engagement work, she sought opportunities to develop both hard and soft skills:

I definitely came in wanting to learn new skills, particularly how to work with people. I wanted to learn how to write grants. I wanted to learn about developing budgets; things of that nature. Writing about outreach, learning about negotiating contracts, things of that nature.

Others described the ways civic engagement provided them with access to resources that they knew would help strengthen their skills and expand their knowledge base in a particular area. For instance, Michael volunteered at an art organization called Music Leads where worked with youth. However, Michael also had aspirations to work in the music industry and had access to Music Leads' musical resources. He volunteered every day because he knew that the organization could provide him with the resources to build his music skillset. Michael explained:

With Music Leads before, when I was a little younger before and I was at the youth, I went there every day and when they opened and I was out when they closed every single day. And because, at the end of the day, I knew what I wanted to do, they had the resources for it, so I used it like my office. And I had, you know, calls coming in and doing networking and all that.

While the majority of study participants did not become civically engaged to develop skills or knowledge, most participants developed human capital-related goals once they began their civic role. For instance, nearly all study participants mentioned unexpectedly leaning soft skills (e.g., listening, "people skills"), and described goals to strengthen these skills. Others developed goals to related to "moving up within the ranks" of a civic engagement activity. For instance, Carol was in charge of peeling potatoes in the kitchen where she served meals. She mentioned that after five years as a volunteer, she desired to acquire skills in the kitchen beyond peeling potatoes:

That's the next step, I think, is to be in charge of the day that you're working and just tell people where to sit and handle the other volunteers. I wouldn't wanna work at the front desk, so this is about it – getting closer with the chef and working with him more beats peeling potatoes all day.

Although Carol did not enter her civic role with any specific goals in mind for her future, over time she established a goal to work alongside the chef. By exposing her to different ways she could be a volunteer, civic participation influenced Carol's aspirations.

*Acquisition of hard and soft skills.* All 31 participants mentioned learning either one hard or soft skill through civic engagement. The most frequently mentioned hard skills were public speaking, writing skills, and specialized skills like fundraising. The most frequently mentioned soft skills were communications, patience, and listening.

*Hard skills.* Participants mentioned a wide range of hard skills that they developed through civic engagement. These skills included, but were not limited to: public speaking, writing skills, fundraising, making phone calls, event planning, direct action, organizing, and learning particular skillsets in areas of policy, music and the arts, and food safety.

The most frequently mentioned hard skill that participants mentioned learning through their civic engagement activities was public speaking. Over half (19 of 31) of study participants mentioned that they were afraid of public speaking or speaking up before participating in civic engagement activities. The majority of participants who developed this skill were involved in event planning and organizing, but participants who were community organizers for tenant rights, incarceration rights, women's rights; volunteers in food banks and for speakers' bureaus; and AmeriCorps volunteers also mentioned this as a skill they developed. For instance, Roger discussed his involvement as a volunteer in a speakers' bureau for formerly homeless people, and described how over time, he became more comfortable speaking in front of people:

At first I was so scared to speak. I remember my first speaking engagement. I want to say it was at Blue College or I think it was Castle University. At that time I had to write everything down, but now I'm so comfortable speaking to the general public that I just – if it's church people I have a church version of speaking to them. If they're school kids I make them laugh and I have a lot of humor in me, I make them laugh. If I'm at a college or high school, you know, I try to lift their spirits up by sharing my testimony where I once was and how I overcame and where I am today.



Similarly, Charles spoke publically through his community organizing work and described how with time and practice he developed skills that could be useful for the future. He explained:

I like to speak to people, which was kinda hard for me 'cause I never really speak to an audience. And when I spoke with almost 500 people, I was real nervous. But I overcame that fear and I did a brilliant job. And the job I had to do was give a superior court judge an award. And so that was challenging and when I got through that, I felt that's one of the skills I'm gonna use, like speaking in public when you do the media – skills; that's like media – making the media work for you.

Although several participants had a fear of public speaking, participants revealed that a sense of urgency around an issue would often outweigh this fear.

Judy described how this has played out for her as a political activist:

Well, you learn not to be afraid to use your voice, and that's one of the things that Political Mirrors has taught me is – 'cause I'm not the type of person that likes to talk in front of a big group of people, but I'm getting over that because as time progresses, especially if it's an issue that's close to my heart, such as housing, such as homelessness, such as environmental issues. When it comes to that stuff, I can't keep quiet; you just can't.

Thus, a strong belief in an issue or cause pushed participants toward developing their public speaking skills.

Not only did public speaking reduce fears over time for many participants, but experience speaking publically allowed participants to learn how to tailor their messages to different groups. For example, Megan explained how through her advocacy work she learned how to speak to politicians in a certain way:

Because you learn about different people, you learn about different issues and what's most important to them. So when you go out and you actually speak to a politician you can advocate properly. You know how to target your audience. You also know how to captivate your audience. I think that's something that's extremely important. If you go in there and you speak with a different dialect or you speak with a different accent or you speak with something that has nothing to do with what the meeting's about, they're going to be turned off.

Writing skills were the second most frequently mentioned type of skill developed through participation in civic engagement. Writing skills were developed through writing press releases, case files, grants, and letters of recommendation. Tracy explained, “I learned how to write grants the more I volunteer – my volunteer service. I learned – I mastered the skill of writing budgets and managing a budget through volunteer work.” She also mentioned learning grant writing was “one of the best skills that I’ve ever learned.” For those participants engaged with political or nonprofit organizations, fundraising and grant proposal writing was vital to the health of the organization.

*Soft skills.* Through civic engagement, participants developed a range of soft skills such as communication, professionalism, listening, socialization, patience, tolerance, and “people skills.” Communication was the most frequently mentioned soft skill learned by participants, and these skills were developed through interactions with people of different ages and backgrounds. Indeed, Hillary, a 26-year-old AmeriCorps volunteer in a school, said, “clear, direct communication is, I think, the biggest thing that I’ve gained from this [AmeriCorps experience].” In addition, Helen, who was the president of an organization’s board of directors, stated that recruiting people from various backgrounds to get involved with the organization helped to strengthen her communication skills:

Like here at Action for Community Needs (ACN) I make phone calls. We’ve got a membership list and we also talk to people that are not members. I’ve got their numbers and I give them the chance and opportunity to explain to them what ACN is all about. I’m constantly saying it in English and in Spanish, so it’s never a problem with how to get involved and so forth and so on.

Communication skills were also regularly mentioned alongside socialization skills. Participants described how repeated interactions with others through civic work made them feel more comfortable communicating and socializing with others. For example,

Luis mentioned that his communication skills improved over time during his volunteer work and made him feel more confident:

Yeah. There's various, I don't know, various ways that have helped me mentally and I guess the way I speak to people, the way I communicate in the community. My communication skills has really gotten better when I talk to youths or just anybody in general. I used to be a shy guy and I walk in a room and I'll just be real humble and not really communicate with everybody. I'll just be there, just joining in, participating but not too much. But now I feel like I can just walk into a room and say, well, hi you all, who are you, how are you, what are you doing, what do you want to do. I just feel more confident.

As with public speaking, participants also discussed the ways their advocacy activities, organizing work, and fundraising provided them with opportunities to learn how to tailor different messages to people. For instance, Robert was a 22-year-old volunteer at the local zoo. He described how he learned to be more adaptable with his language, particularly around kids:

At the zoo, I'm the person you're meeting when people are coming up to your exhibit. They're gonna be someone new, so it's like how do you switch gears? Because every person's gonna be different. Okay, I'm talking to a little kid. These giraffes have really long necks. They use their necks to eat grass. Versus the adult, like you know why that giraffe is drinking the other one's pee? It's trying to see whether it's fertile or not. I've been told that I'm not very adaptable with my language sometimes, that sometimes it's just – it's not accessible to different types of people, the way I talk, or the way I think, so trying to think okay, be more flexible about the way you're talking. Be more flexible based on who I'm working with. If you're working with kids, you're not gonna, like I said, talk about the giraffes and fertilization and stuff like that, so being more flexible about that.

Robert's volunteer work served as a venue for him to learn how to "switch gears" and tailor his language to different members of the community.

In addition to communication, participants mentioned developing patience and listening skills through their civic engagement experiences. Each of the participants who mentioned developing patience skills also mentioned that they were, at one point in their lives, not as patient. For instance, Richard explained how his involvement with the Black

Panther Party during college made him discouraged about civic work. However, his involvement as an organizer and advocate for housing rights, an issue that affected his own life, restored his interest in civic work. Here, Richard described the ways his organizing work contributed to developing his patience and listening skills:

But I think I'm growing now, and I've become a little bit more patient. There are always other alternatives or other ways, and other means to show people what you want, and why you want it, and why you need it. Being with – talking with other people and deciding, and having to decide things with a group of people, you have to sit back and listen to their ideas. Now, you may be able to incorporate their ideas with you, or with yours, and come up with something really good, or you may not. You have to start all over. Go back to your drawing board. But that patience comes in to listening to other people, and listening to other ideas. I've been called a hothead at times, and whatnot because I do strike quickly. But when you sit back and you listen, and you watch how things evolve and whatnot, sometimes jumping in right away is not the right thing to do. I've learned to listen better. I've learned to listen with an open mind, and to understand what I'm listening to. So, that's about the best thing that I could say that I've learned from here.

Similarly, Gary described how working with ten-year-olds as a volunteer basketball coach in his community taught him patience:

Because it taught me – it taught me patience. It taught me patience, because I coached ten and under. So it's kinda difficult to get them, to like, to run a play or just to do – just sometimes just take the ball out or bring the ball up court, you know, without everybody being right there trying to be next – trying to get them the ball. You know and so that helped me a lot with my patience. Because that would – my patience can be kinda short at times. And you know they – and they're easy to – you know but at the end of the day, you know, how to be – you know what? They just ten.

Both of these men demonstrated how their civic activities provided a space for them to strengthen their patience and listening skills. Richard's organizing work provided him with an opportunity to be a part of conversations involving collective goals and actions, which made him more patient and a better listener. Gary's experiences with ten-year-olds developed his patience skills.

***Formal and informal skill and knowledge development.*** Participants mentioned both formal and informal ways they developed skills and knowledge through civic engagement. While some participants stressed the importance of formal learning environments to access and build human capital, others highlighted positive experiences with being “thrown into the experience.”

*Formal learning environments.* Nearly all 12 of the community organizers in the study sample participated in a formal leadership institute or free class that trained organizers. Participants discussed the ways these formal learning environments helped them learn public speaking and communication skills. Richard described his experience learning public speaking skills at a class within an organization:

Here, especially with the Organizing Training Institute (OTI) class, we had a section or time, where we did public speaking. So that, right there, specifically helped me because I have been asked to speak at other venues. I do – when we go down to the State House to go to the hearings, whether or not – I do testify a lot. So even in speaking with the legislators, one-on-one, all of that helps. All of that helps because you get more comfortable talking to people that you don’t know. That’s what really scares people in public speaking. I don’t know them people. Know what I’m saying. So it helps you relax and slow down, and say what you need to say, the way it needs to be said to people that you don’t know. Then that sort of helps break the ice, and gets the conversation rolling.

Thurs, Richard was able to transfer the public speaking skills he learned at the OTI class to improve his performance at State House.

Participants also described structured activities such as role playing that strengthened fundraising, community organizing, and communication skills. For instance, Judy explained how role playing in her organization influenced her community organizing and activism:

We do like little exercises where we break off into groups and we do role playing and stuff like that. I enjoy that ‘cause it’s interactive with other folks and you learn something, you know what I mean? Just gives you the strength and the courage to take a stand and speak up basically.

Yet, despite access to formal training and activities, some participants recognized a mismatch between the existing skills of organizers and their community organizing training. For instance, Phil, a 61-year-old man who served as a community organizer and activist for over 30 years, found that individuals who did not have strong reading skills were at a disadvantage because others regularly told them how to speak about an issue. Phil believed that the misalignment between their existing reading skills and the training strategy influenced the impact on the community, and explained:

What they give you is, you read it in front of them so they knew if you could read or not. If you couldn't read that much, they framed it to make you speak as well, as you could speak. That's where, in my opinion, some of things are missing. They want our people to speak. But when you read something for a person, and he doesn't understand what you're reading, or he's standing like – that's how the organizer, how dare you do that? How dare you disrespect our people by making them look stupid?

Here, Phil suggested that feeding information to those with limited reading skills was a disservice to the organizers. Because the training strategy did not align with the current needs, skillset, or strengths of the organizers, it was less likely that this strategy would be effective in developing long-term human capital assets for the organizers.

*Hands-on learning.* The majority of study participants learned hard and soft skills through “hands on doing” (Helen). Indeed, the “trail by fire” (Hillary) or “learning as you go” (Anthony) strategies to develop skills were mentioned by several participants, primarily those who were engaged in volunteering, community organizing, and political advocacy. For instance, Don described how he learned communication skills through his time as a volunteer canvasser. When asked how, he said, “from experience, really. Just from practice and practice and practice; doing it hundreds of times and seeing what motivates somebody.” Similarly, Jenny, when describing how she learned to work with computers in her volunteer tech role, said, “It's not like they sit you down and teach you.

It's just something that you pick up over time." In addition, Walter's supervisor in his volunteer role gave him an opportunity to develop leadership skills through ownership over the food and clothing distribution at an organization serving low-income people. He took pride in his work, particularly because his supervisor trusted his judgment behind the policies he implemented in his volunteer role. For each of these study participants, the opportunity to "learn by doing" through civic activities facilitated skill development.

However, other study participants found that a lack of structure and preparation was not an effective way to build skills. Richard believed that community organizing, for instance, was "not something that you just jump into and go at it. You have to prepare yourself to go out and talk to people." He believed this was necessary because "you have to have an agenda, so that you know what you're talking about, and what and what you want them to do."

Maya experienced a lack of preparation and training first hand when she was asked to speak publically on behalf of a community organizing group. She explained:

With Ground Up (GU) I've done a few public speaking events, one being the May 1<sup>st</sup> immigration day, whenever it was. I've spoken at – I don't where the place is. Oh, the Rhode Island downtown building. At the historic building I spoke there, spoke there twice for separate events. Also, I've also did a speech or whatever at the State House. And without GU, I probably would have never done it. And so that was a good experience. I've never done it before but – I wasn't scared, I was just kind of upset that I wasn't – it wasn't – there was not a lot of preparation. There was but there wasn't because I've never – like I'm not in that line of work so I didn't know what to say.

Although Maya appreciated the opportunity to develop her public speaking skills, she was upset that she was underprepared to speak in front of others. Thus, hands-on learning provided access to human capital assets in most of these civic environments, but assets were more likely to be mobilized in environments that did not require as much preparation or structure.

*Bringing knowledge, skills, and experiences to civic role.* Not only did individuals learn different types of skills and knowledge through civic engagement, but each of the 31 low-income individuals entered their civic roles with their own life histories, stories, and strengths. Participants described the ways they were able to bring these human capital assets into the issue areas they were a part of through their civic activities, and also how they leveraged these skills and knowledge to access additional human capital assets.

*Experienced a hardship related to a civic issue area.* Nearly all participants mentioned hardships they encountered in their lives and the ways these hardships aligned with the issue areas they were involved with in the community. Examples of hardships included homelessness, incarceration, foreclosure, mental health, disability, violence, drugs, addiction, not completing high school, and a death in the family or community. Ten of the 31 respondents mentioned being homeless at some point in their lives, and four discussed the ways it contributed to their civic engagement experiences. For instance, Richard discussed how he was able to bring in knowledge from his life experience into the homelessness work as a part of in the community. He explained:

Having that knowledge and knowing that gives me, and then, like I said, being homeless myself, gives me an insight whereas, hey, because this is happening to these people that don't make them bad people. They're not people that you may not – that you don't want to help. These are the kind of people that you want to help, and you want to bring them into the organization, because they're going through this. They have direct knowledge of – firsthand knowledge of it.

Incarceration affected the lives of eight participants and three participants experienced incarceration themselves. Charles, was previously incarcerated, described the day he was recruited as a volunteer for a prison committee of a social justice organization, and how it made him feel:



I was living off the street and I was just walking down this street; head down, didn't know what I wanted to do, no money in my pocket. I was just feeling like what was my purpose on this planet. Just walked in. And so they had some ladies outside and one of them knew me, and she said well, Charles, wanna come in for – how you doing? All right. Would you like to have coffee? Yeah, sure. Come on in. We're trying to put together a prison committee, and we've never been in prison. We don't know – we're ladies, we don't know. Can you help us? I was like took back from that because nobody asked me my thoughts all my life; was just thoughts of who got the best material, who got the best dope, where's the bottom at? That's all the people I always – never really asked me about my ideas. But it was something that was new to me, and I felt like a butterfly; a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, like wings had started opening up, and I said damn. It's just been that kind of party ever since.

The women recognized the ways Charles could bring his skills and knowledge into a volunteer role at the organization. Over the years, Charles leveraged his previous knowledge to develop leadership and community organizing skills within the organization and the broader community.

Six participants described times in their lives when their homes were scheduled for foreclosure. Similar to Charles' experience, Richard initially heard about a local organization that organized people for housing rights when they came to his door telling him that he might be evicted. He then got involved as an organizer. He said:

Just in the past couple of years here, this bill that we're fighting for that's what drew me in. You know what I'm saying, because they gave me some information that I did not know, and was not aware of. I said to myself, "Okay, let's go and find out. Let's go and talk, and listen, and see if this is something that I can get involved with." Because of the situation that I was in – and like I said, this is very timely. They came and gave me this information. I wanted to come here and talk to them and find out how I could help. Could I use my voice? Could I use my knowledge of how to speak and my rallying knowledge to help this group help other people?

Here, Richard described how he got involved as an organizer because he wanted to help people in a situation similar to him. He brought his own knowledge of the issue to the community, as well as his voice.

In addition, study participants mentioned that they were able to relate to those in their communities because they “speak their language.” Over half (20 of the 31) participants grew up in the community in which they were civically engaged, and their knowledge of the community influenced how they interacted with others. For instance, Gary, who served as an AmeriCorps volunteer as a case manager, grew up with his own case manager. He said:

You know like I said, I was in group homes and stuff like so I had a case manager and you know. I just remember all them times and say I’m, probably, boring ‘em. Let me – well, let me say it in a language that they understand. And that was the other thing, too. Like you know so I’m joking, just being in the streets, I speak their language. Even now, like I’m 35 years old; but the 16-year-olds, I understand them. I speak their language. I’m able to talk to ‘em. So – but what I can do is, you know, working here gives me the opportunity to, you know, still have my hands out in the community. You know what I’m saying? Have a reach and, you know, and I’m from this neighborhood. So a lot of people know me already.

Here, Gary simultaneously leveraged his community assets to inform his civic work and developed human capital assets as a case manager.

*Bring knowledge of a skillset to civic engagement.* Participants also described the ways that they brought their own skillsets to their civic roles and strengthened these skills through their civic experiences. Some of these skills included teaching, making music and other forms of art, health care skills, teaching, speaking a language, doing hair, and working with computers. For instance, Anthony used to work at a Boys and Girls Club and coached basketball on a volunteer basis for several years. He leveraged the organizing skills from his previous roles and transferred them to his volunteer role as teacher. He explained, “You learn all the skills of how to work with or organize a group of kids, working on this organized sort of team project. And that is an example of something I was able to leverage in the classroom.”

In addition, Luis, who volunteered at community arts center and worked with youth to create music, has “been able to bless others with knowledge.” He explained:

I’m basically kinda advanced with making beats, producing. I’ve been doing it for 13 years. Most of the programs they have there I’ve already used them. So the kids that go there -- there’s only one instructor so I help out and I assist sometimes. Say if I have one class during beat-making class, like a different class, I just walk in there and see if they need a hand or anything.

Participants also described ways their skills were strengthened through their civic roles. For example, Rebecca received her certification in case management ten years ago, but never had an opportunity to serve as a case manager. For years she could not obtain a paid position, but started volunteering as an AmeriCorps VISTA at an organization, where she leveraged her existing skills and knowledge and built her skillset along the way.

### **Access to Social Capital and Human Capital Assets through Civic Engagement**

When describing their civic engagement experiences, participants regularly mentioned instances in which social and human capital were simultaneously accessed. This section includes a brief analysis of ways social capital provided access to human capital, and human capital provided access to social capital.

#### ***Social access point was closely related to who taught human capital skills.***

Participants described the ways they accessed skills and knowledge through a social capital access point. Tracy, for instance, explained how she used her connections from multiple networks from several different types of civic activities (e.g., volunteer for a well-established neighborhood initiative, organizer in a growing grassroots initiative) to develop specific skillsets. In fact, the woman she met through the well-established neighborhood initiative became her co-director of the grassroots organization that she

founded. According to Tracy, this woman had “a whole set of skills, she knew how to grant write; how to write grants. And so she – we became a team and wrote a grant together and ended up getting a grant.” Tracy described the way she was able to access human capital through this relationship with her co-director:

Her sitting there and me sitting on the side of her and answering questions while I’m looking at the grant application. So that was one way. And then her asking questions about different needs that we might have to do the program. What are those needs, so which became line items. For a budget. And then it’s just like practical learning. It’s being right there while somebody’s doing something, and then doing it with them and then seeing the end product and then have something to go by, a template, and then you use that and then you do it and then you send it to them to edit, to look at, and then you might send it to someone else to look at and edit. And that process becomes permanent. And then you get it and then managing the grant once you get it, and then having to do the reports which kind of supports the whole creating the budget because you know in order to create the budget and manage it and then write the report.

Tracy’s co-director helped her learn about multiple processes, which slowly improved her skillset. This example demonstrated the way access to a social network could sometimes serve as an access point to human capital to develop hard skills.

Similarly, Phil discussed how his connections with people in the community helped him develop both hard and soft skills and navigate social situations. He described the ways a professor at a local university and a woman who worked for the city helped him learn to communicate messages with others:

Because they all helped me speak in a proper vein, so I don’t always have to go out and use my superlatives. A lot of times, I’m not around here to play. So sometimes the message will get lost because instead of thinking I’m passionate, they think I’m angry, and that I’m swearing. I’m some Black guy that just wants to bully them.

Without help from his social networks, Phil believed his messages could be taken the wrong way. Additionally, Phil mentioned that he met others through his civic work who “got me connected to certain people, I know I would never get connected to.” With access to bridging social capital, he learned skills that have helped him professionally:

“They showed me how to do a job. They trained me how to talk in a certain way. Someone even taught me how to dress from time-to-time.”

Others described ways their relationships strengthened existing skills or expanded their knowledge base about a particular topic. Roger, an aspiring writer, discussed the ways someone in his speakers bureau pushed him to improve his writing:

You know what, there's a guy who's involved in speakers bureau and he's been involved with me for four years now and he's a member. They call him Dave. He's a poet guy that guy. He's just as good as me and sometimes we write back and forth, whatever you can do I can do better. He's very talented and he lifts me up and gives me that spark, oh I can do better than that, here we go, you know, and we go back and forth. So that's inspiration in my behalf.

Thus, Roger and Dave's relationship through their civic work that strengthened their writing skills.

***Human capital influenced or created social capital.*** In other cases, participants used their knowledge to access or strengthen social relationships. Participants also used their human capital to help others in their civic social networks. For example, Barb, who learned about housing and tenant rights through her work as a community organizer at Equality First, provided a person from her church with access to knowledge and social resources about how to navigate a situation housing system:

With church I have a friend that, her house was being foreclosed. They [Equality First] were like, well, this is where you need to go. So they help you and tell you where – like, I never asked no one for help for – I'm always giving and I never receive. So to come here and just say, “Well I just got a termination letter.” They were like, well, this is what you need to do. This is where you need to go. I'm like, oh, I didn't think I qualified. They're like, it don't have to find that they – they knock you down and you come back and we'll send you somewhere else. She [the friend from church] ended up getting what she wanted, so she, it was like, how shall I put this? It's a fight. They're [Equality First] willing to fight for whatever you want, or what you need.

This example showed that simultaneous access to social capital and human capital can be used to strengthen existing relationships.

In fact, the acquisition of human capital skills such as communication led to the expansion of social networks. Colleen described the way she learned a skill (networking) through her civic activities, which provided her access to more people:

I learned networking – I learned how to change my conversation – and without talking down or talking dumb to anybody, but I learned how to carry my same conversation, whether I'm at a house standing outside talking to people when they're in a food line, or whether I'm going to the police station and having a meeting with the chief, or whether I'm coming back and doing a meeting or whether I'm going back to the state house. And it's helped me meet people. It's helped me get hookups, whether it's like giving donations, whether it's finding funders, whether it's sending people to places, and they can come in and say Stewart told me to come.

Therefore, by learning how to strategically network, Colleen was able to expand her own social network.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

Interview data highlighted the ways participation in a variety of civic activities provided access to social capital and human capital assets. Findings suggested that the type of civic engagement did not matter for the access and accrual of social and human capital as much as the conditions under which individuals found themselves in during the civic engagement experience.

Consistent with the literature on social capital and civic engagement, low-income participants provided clear examples of the ways their civic engagement served as an access point to social capital. For study participants, participation led to broader social networks, bonding social capital, and bridging social capital. Several participants described instances in which civic participation set up opportunities to develop trust, norms of reciprocity, and provide or receive help during times of hardship. Other study participants described challenges creating bonds in their respective civic experiences due

to a lack of opportunities to interact or not “feeling a connection” with others.

Participants also mentioned ways bridging social capital was accessed across different social class, racial groups, and organizations, but also described challenges accessing opportunities for bridging social capital due to structural factors such as discrimination.

Additionally, participants described their experiences accessing skills, knowledge, and other human capital assets through their civic engagement. Goals to develop new skills and knowledge, the acquisition and strengthening of hard and soft skills, and bringing in knowledge and skills were examples of ways human capital was accessed during civic engagement for this sample. Participants described experiences with both formal and hands-on learning, citing an array of hard and soft skills accessed through their civic roles. In addition, nearly all study participants shared ways they were able to bring in their own knowledge, life histories, and strengths to their civic roles, and regularly cited personal hardships that aligned with their civic issues of choice. Participants also described how they leveraged community assets to strengthen skillsets and expand knowledge.

Taken together, these findings suggest that participation in civic engagement provides a venue for low-income individuals to access both social and human capital assets. However, it is also important to understand how these assets were mobilized to explain the relationship found in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 presents the ways access to social and human capital within a civic engagement opportunity influences economic opportunities.

## **Chapter 6. Social Capital and Human Capital Assets: Bridging Civic Engagement and Economic Opportunity**

### **Overview**

The previous chapter demonstrated the ways social and human capital assets were accessed through participation in civic engagement. However, it was also important to understand how these assets were activated or could be mobilized to influence economic outcomes. Moreover, understanding the ways social and human capital may bridge civic engagement and economic outcomes can help to explain the relationship presented in Chapter 4. This chapter addresses research question 3, which seeks to understand these relationships:

**Research Question 3:** How does access to social and human capital assets within a civic engagement opportunity influence economic opportunities for low-income individuals?

Study participants described how access to social capital and human capital via civic engagement influenced economic opportunities in the past, and also shared the ways their social capital and human capital could contribute to future economic aspirations. Together, it was clear that access to social and human capital through participation in civic engagement did influence economic opportunities, particularly those related to employment and education, for low-income individuals.

This chapter begins with a presentation of findings related to the ways social capital acquired through civic engagement influenced economic opportunities, exploring



themes related to past and future economic opportunities. Findings are then presented in the context of human capital. The final section of this chapter presents the ways social and human capital interact to influence economic opportunities.

**Overview of themes.** Table 6.1 presents an overview of the themes related to economic opportunity, and only themes directly related to research question 3 were presented in this chapter. Participants were asked about the ways their civic engagement experiences helped them in their lives, including the two a priori categories and nine themes italicized in the table. In addition, participants often mentioned the ways civic engagement helped them gain access to economic opportunities even before being asked these questions, producing 14 emergent themes.

**Table 6.1.** Economic opportunity themes: A priori categories and themes in *italics*

<b>Economic opportunity categories</b>	<b>Social capital themes</b>	<b>Human capital themes</b>
<i>Past economic opportunities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Job through connections</i></li> <li>• <i>Information about job opportunity</i></li> <li>• Shared networks</li> <li>• <i>Norms of reciprocity</i></li> <li>• <i>Trust</i></li> <li>• Help during a period of unemployment</li> <li>• Going to school</li> <li>• Saving a home</li> <li>• Recipient of organization's services prior to volunteering</li> <li>• Employment at place volunteered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-time jobs</li> <li>• Part-time jobs</li> <li>• <i>Strengthened-skills</i></li> <li>• Higher income but only via obtaining a job</li> <li>• Career shaping</li> </ul>
<i>Future economic opportunities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Access to job references and resources</i></li> <li>• <i>Levering networks</i></li> <li>• Broke down barriers to job acquisition</li> <li>• Access to knowledge if moving</li> <li>• Change in career or education aspirations</li> <li>• Alignment of social capital and job goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic engagement as an investment</li> <li>• <i>Signals to employers</i></li> <li>• <i>Transferrable skills and knowledge</i></li> <li>• Alignment of human capital with job goals</li> </ul>

During the interviews, participants described the ways they mobilized the social capital and human capital from their civic engagement experiences toward economic opportunities, specifically related to their employment, education, and careers. This chapter includes an overview of the ways these themes emerged from the data, followed by a detailed analysis of the major aspects of social capital, human capital, and economic opportunities found in this study.

### **Social Capital and Economic Opportunity**

“One of the biggest ways was I was able to find a job through it [volunteering].”

– Tracy, 40-year-old volunteer

**Findings on social capital and economic opportunity.** The following section includes findings related to major themes on how access to social capital via civic engagement influenced economic opportunities for low-income individuals. Participants described numerous ways their social capital influenced economic opportunities, particularly within the context of employment.

***Social capital’s influence on past job prospects.*** The majority of study participants (20 of 31) mentioned ways access to social capital influenced their job prospects. This section will describe how participants acquired jobs through connections and shared networks in their civic roles.

***Job acquisition through connections from civic engagement.*** Participants regularly mentioned acquiring a job through connections from their civic activities. While participants most frequently mentioned acquiring part-time jobs, others mentioned obtaining full-time work. Participants heard about jobs through emails, listservs, and community job boards, but the most common way participants heard about jobs was

through word of mouth. For instance, Tracy described how her access to connections within her civic roles directly influenced her ability to obtain employment:

It [civic engagement] has helped me with getting connections to employment or job openings that people might know about that I might be qualified for to tell me about them. That's why I can open doors the way that I have. Because my ability to be able to connect with people and opportunities that I've had to connect with people. Sherry put me on to the job at Community Works. With AmeriCorps VISTA, I got put on to that through doing community service at Creativity Jumps, and then they brought it to me that there was a position that was made available.

Tracy's engagement with multiple networks (see Chapter 5) through her civic activities provided access to different people who connected her with employment.

Similarly, Megan believed her connections through a four-month volunteer opportunity with the state police helped her to first obtain an internship, followed by a full-time job. She described her post-volunteer experience when she was looking for a job:

They said, well, we'll give you a call if we do end up having something open. And I ended up in the meantime volunteering for another state representative who ended up referring me back to the same people I called and it kind of just put in that extra note and said, okay, okay, okay, we'll come in and we'll interview you, if we like you and everything still works the same as when you were first with us we'll get you an internship. I just got a start date and they told me to come in. I walked in and they were like, oh okay, we need your social security number and all this other stuff, and I'm like, but I'm an intern. They're like, no, you're a paid intern. I said, oh I gotta job. And so that ended up rolling into the full-time job that I have now.

Megan's initial connections through her volunteer positions connected her with a paid internship opportunity, and ultimately turned into a full-time paid job.

Moreover, social capital accessed through civic activities occasionally helped study participants overcome structural barriers to employment. For instance, Ray, a 26-year-old volunteer who was on parole and needed a job, described how he obtained a part-time position through his supervisor in the civic organization:

I'm on parole, and I had a certain time to get a job, or if not, they was going to put me in jail. So I went to her, and she helped me out. They actually got me a little – how do you call it? A valet job some of the time, I don't know if I start next week, or something.

In addition, participants in the previous chapter cited trust as a feature of social capital that was bonded between them and others within their civic organizations, institutions, or groups. Trust was also mentioned as a feature present for participants when describing those who helped them acquire a job. For instance, when asked how he obtained the Executive Director job of an organization, Phil said:

Through the board of directors. They trusted me when I was president for three years. They trusted me to know that I would do what I say, regardless to the fact of what politician, or what community group tried to put pressure.

Thus, consistent with findings from the previous chapter, participation in a long-term civic role was mentioned alongside both trust and employment.

Maintaining relationships with civically engaged peers over time also influenced the ways participants heard about jobs. In particular, Rosa described how norms of reciprocity emerged from some of her civic roles and relationships, meaning that she provided and received information about jobs through her civic social networks. She explained:

Yes, people email me things all the time like different kinds of trainings and things like that. I know if I know of someone that isn't working or something and I come across something, I always send them job information.

This two-way information channel that came out of her relationships with others simultaneously sustained connections and helped Rosa and her peers receive access to information about jobs.

*Shared network as an access point of economic opportunity.* Participants described the ways their broadened social networks through civic activities (see Chapter

5) provided access to job opportunities. For instance, Don explained that his networks helped him learn about his current job. He did not have a strong connection with the organization, but mentioned that his “shared network,” consisting of other organizations he was involved with as a volunteer, helped introduce him to his current position. He said:

And so then I don't think that – and I didn't have that great a connection with like the organizers at Mission to Action, but it was our shared network who were like you guys are a perfect match or whatever; you've got to get together. So that's an example where the network was really important.

Similarly, Anthony held two part time jobs, one at a youth development organization and another at a homeless shelter. He obtained the youth development job through his connections from his volunteer work with youth in the community, but he explained that this position provided access to information about his second job. First, when speaking about how he obtained job at the youth development organization, he said:

I initially got because I was trying to collaborate with another organization; and in attempts to collaborate with them, they actually just offered me a job. I was trying to do like a barter where they would send someone over to teach my students Spanish; and I would volunteer to teach at their school, whatever I could teach that they needed. It ended up turning into a job. And then one thing starts to lead to another.

What began as norms of reciprocity between two networks (the organization and the school) eventually became a job opportunity for Anthony. Once he obtained this position at the youth development organization, he regularly attended conferences in the community. He explained how his shared network turned into a second job opportunity:

I was once at this professional development conference from that job, speaking to one of my co-workers; and somebody overheard me in this conversation with them. And then they emailed me later and were like, “Hey, I was just at the conference; and I heard you saying this. Would you be interested in coming to work there?” And that's actually how I got my job now.

Thurs, a shared network served as a mechanism for individuals to hear about or be recruited for a job.

*Change in status within an organization.* Several participants experienced a change in their status within an organization over time; this meant that a participant either transitioned from a recipient of an organization's services to a volunteer, or from a volunteer to a paid employee. Nearly all study participants (28 of 31) described a time in their lives where they received help or services in the community from an organization, the government, family, or friends. In fact, almost half of the study participants mentioned that they became volunteers within the organizations that once served them, and five study participants transitioned from a volunteer role to a paid position within an organization over time.

Colleen, for example, progressed from receiving an organization's services, to volunteering, to working there part-time. At one time in her life she received a free bed from a furniture bank and maintained a relationship with the man from the organization who delivered the bed. She said, "A few months later, I went to a place where he was working at and I went there as a client to get some food, diapers, or something. I ended up volunteering there." Later she described how her volunteer work transitioned into a part-time job at the organization:

Ended up getting a job there a couple of years later and seeing this guy all the time. A couple years later, a few years later rather, I was having another baby; I was pregnant with twins. One of my sons died. At the same time, my friend Shaun [the man who delivered her bed] was the assistant executive director of Hope First he's transitioning over to start AIDS Action because he had a 17-year-old son who was dying of leukemia and at the time, that's when they were talking about – just starting to talk about AIDS in the mid 80s. And so our paths were getting close because of losses that we were both going through. He started AIDS Action at the beginning, it was called Healthy Families and Action (HFA). I volunteered there and would work there per diem randomly with the kids and then we just always stayed friends. He would be like somebody that I could call

if I was sad. He would be a gossip resource. This guy knows everybody's business in Providence, no matter who it is; from mayors to street people to whoever. And then I would still do per diem work for him sometimes and volunteer. I was working at Head Start, my job at Head Start was ending, and I asked him could I work over the Christmas holidays, like some regular hours, and I ended up working there for 10 years after that.

Colleen's relationship Shaun influenced her mobility within the organization and ultimately, her employment status. Not only did Shaun provide social support, but he also provided access to employment via volunteerism. However, it should be noted that the line between unpaid and paid work became blurred for Colleen; distinguishing between paid and unpaid work was also a challenge mentioned by the other study participants who received a stipend or eventual job from their volunteer work.

*Social capital's influence on future economic opportunities.* Study participants believed that the social capital acquired through civic engagement could influence their future economic opportunities. Participants mentioned social capital in the context of changes in educational, career, and job aspirations, as well as job references and resources. In particular, participants stressed the importance of the alignment between their civic engagement, social capital, and future educational, career, and job aspirations.

*Social capital influenced education and career aspirations.* Several study participants mentioned how social capital acquired through civic engagement influenced their educational and career aspirations. A person affiliated with the participants' civic organization or group often activated the change in aspiration or goal. Participants frequently described the ways their civic engagement experience influenced their desire to seek out higher education, as approximately 35% of study participants attended some college but did not complete their degree (see Table A.2 in Appendix A). For example, both Gary and Rebecca mentioned that their AmeriCorps education award could help

them return to school, and they both plan to take advantage this opportunity after completing their year of service. In addition, Rebecca met someone in through her volunteer position who ran a program targeted toward people who previously began a degree program but were unable to finish. As a mother, finding out about this program was particularly helpful for Rebecca, as the degree program removed barriers for parents such as providing daycare while she attends classes. Thus, Rebecca's AmeriCorps experience provided access to information about a program that could simultaneously meet her educational and personal needs, as well as an opportunity to fund her education through an education award.

Pam's desire to return to school was spurred by her interactions with several young women who were abused. She met these young women through her community organizing work, and shared a conversation she had with one young woman in particular, who made Pam realize that she wanted to go back to school to help domestic abuse survivors. She explained:

Me and her just started talking, and I gave her a ride home. That's how I found out that she was being abused. I've been there. I was in a relationship with my ex-husband for 26 years, and it was an abusive relationship. I had also let him know that it wasn't just – it's not the physical, but the mental that bothers us the most. She just broke down and she started crying. So I was able to tell her you don't have to live like that 'cause God didn't mean for us to live like that. We say yes, until death do us part, but God – we are God's children, and he does not mean for no man to be beating on you. My thing was – my mom says you're married 'til death do you part, but my mom didn't know what was going on behind closed doors. Because I was able to talk to her, I'm going – I'm going to go back to school next September, and I am going to become an advocate.

For Pam, her community organizing work provided her with access to young women who were affected by this issue, which reactivated her interest in returning to school to become an advocate.



In addition, 18-year-old Steven, who mentioned Andre his AmeriCorps mentor in the previous chapter, developed an interest in serving as an AmeriCorps volunteer himself. He explained:

Well, Andre and a couple other of the workers there, they're just cool guys and, yeah and they have a lot to say, a lot to give and I feel like I – me too. I've been tellin' Andre I wanna get in the AmeriCorps, but I think they just don't take me seriously. I'm really serious about it. I think I'll be – I think I'll be like a good – 'cause – I don't wanna say they're old-school street workers are anything like that but there's a lot of young gang members out there that really don't take the old street workers seriously if you wanna say and I feel like if I come in I could really stop a war preventing or something. Yeah 'cause I know a lot of people. I know a lot of people from different sides and I think I could be help.

Steven's exposure to his mentor, Andre, made him realize that AmeriCorps could be for him. Although Steven believed he could bring a lot of his own social capital assets to the experience, because of the legal and educational challenges in his life, he was unsure whether others would take him seriously.

*Access to job references and resources.* Participants mentioned that the people they met through their civic engagement experiences could provide access to job references and resources. In fact, the majority of participants who obtained references through civic engagement were those in the previous chapter who mentioned civic engagement as one of their first “positive” entry points into a social network. For Rebecca, who was previously a stay at home parent, her experience in AmeriCorps provided her with her first opportunity in her adult life to obtain references. She explained:

I had no references by staying at home; it's just me. So now I'll have references. They see that I'm very interested; and they see that when I come in, I'm focused; I do what I gotta do. They see that I'm here to help.

Charles believed that participation in civic engagement activities could “break down the barrier of getting a job” through job references. Charles noted that even though

he was incarcerated and only had an eighth or ninth grade education, the people he volunteered with saw him for who he “really is.” He explained:

I think you get good reference. I think you can get references from folks and they know you can do the job. So many good reference that – and then didn’t finish high school. My education is maybe eighth, ninth, something. But all that, I don’t use the big, fancy words and all that stuff, but it’s transpired. It’s a soft temperature check for the community and people for each human being. I think that’s important.

Similarly, Luis, who left high school but was in the process of completing his GED, believed that if he continued to volunteer at the arts organization, trust would develop between him and the people he worked with over time. He explained why he believed others in his organization would provide him with a recommendation:

I feel like if I just keep on going to the organization and learning more, learn the programs and possibly connecting different programs with each other and people, that it’s gonna just give me that credibility to say, all right, this guy we can trust him, he knows what he’s doing, he knows how to do this and do that, he knows how to get somewhere whenever he’s not anywhere.

Thus, those participants who entered civic engagement without other networks, had little education, and established a sense of trust with others in their organization believed that people they worked with in civic environments saw them as credible, and would provide them with a reference. Participants could mobilize their social resources into an asset (a reference) that could be used when necessary.

Indeed, participants discussed the ways they could strategically leverage social resources, such as references, into social capital. For instance, Maya, a student, described how she would go about selecting a reference when she applied for a job in the future:

I have my compartments in my head of who works where, who does what, who interests are this and that. So whenever I do need something, I’ll reach out to the person that I need and then I’ll try to work it that way and when it comes to jobs I’ll ask this one and that one and try to get the help that way.

Some unemployed study participants also had access to other social resources in their organizations such as career counseling, job programs, or members of an organization who were willing to help with a job search. For instance, Lois, a 56-year old unemployed woman who volunteered at her church, explained how her church had resources to help her with her job search:

Well, they do have people that are members there or just come to visit, who say, “Okay, there’s jobs available for this particular area.” There’s help in this profession. So if that’s something you find you’re interested in, they have the different avenues to help you.

Thus, study participants believed they could activate and mobilize these social resources into social capital assets that could be used when necessary.

*Strategic alignment between civic experience, and social capital, and career goals.* Study participants stressed the importance of meeting the appropriate people to help them achieve their future job and career goals. They also noted that not all civic engagement opportunities provided access to the “right” types of people. Participants described the ways they learned about which social resource might be the best for them to access at a particular point in their lives. For instance, Luis said that his experience volunteering at an arts organization introduced him to people who supported his interests and job goals. He explained that the people he interacted with every day at the organization could help him as a musician in the future:

I plan to take advantage of it, like the opportunities that I have through the people that I’ve met to help me and also to help me help others. I think that’s my mission. The person that I want to I guess go after, like my career, is just music and any type of music production. Anything with music. That’s what I love. It’s what I like to expand my mind with. It goes back to meeting new people almost every day.

Like Luis, Robert – an AmeriCorps volunteer at a museum – also planned to leverage his civic networks and strategically selected a mentor in his organization who aligned with

his future career goals. Initially he was assigned a mentor that focused museum exhibits, but because he considered returning to school to become a researcher, Robert wanted to learn more about research. He explained how he acquired his mentor:

They were like okay, do you wanna work with the director of exhibits? I was like actually, no. I wanna work with the project researcher 'cause I know that when she was presenting at our training, I felt more comfortable. I knew that she was a very approachable person, and I knew that she had more time for me because when you're a director, you obviously don't have as much time. So I was like I feel that wouldn't be an investment on any of our behalves. That's how I got her.

Because Robert knew what his career goals were before entering his AmeriCorps role, he made sure his civic experience exposed him to the right person to align with those goals. He also recognized that the director of exhibits might be busier than the project researcher, and therefore asked for a mentor who could devote enough time to him.

Megan was strategic in a different way. She mentioned that over time, she learned which types of civic engagement were the most beneficial for her to gain access to the appropriate social resources. She explained:

In the beginning I wanted to do everything, everything under the sun. You name it, like pick up trash one day and then go be president the next. And I had to realize that that's not logical. I'm going to get tired very easily. There's going to be people that are going to use me and then do everything that I want them to do and then them run around with the credits and be like, okay, yep, I did everything, I'm great, I'm all set and go. So not only did I have to get rid of those negative people I had to kind of tier what I wanted to do with my personal goals. So I wanted to be able to grab things that I know could help in the community as well as help myself at the same time. So for me that's how I went from doing 20,000 things to doing only five.

These study participants strategically sought out civic experiences and social resources that aligned with their future career goals.

## Human Capital and Economic Opportunity

*“It sounds so, so simple. I’ve learned from the experiences and opportunities in volunteering that I can adjust it to anything.”*

– Luis 20-year-old arts organization volunteer

**Findings on human capital and economic opportunity.** Alongside social capital, participants were asked to describe the ways human capital assets were activated to influence economic outcomes. The following section includes an examination of the major themes related to how access to human capital through civic engagement influenced economic opportunities. Participants described the ways their human capital influenced economic outcomes, particularly related to employment in the past and future job or career goals.

***Human capital’s influence on past employment.*** Study participants described how the hard and soft skills they accessed through civic engagement helped them obtain employment, and frequently described the ways human capital resources were transferrable to paid positions. For instance, Megan attributed her employment at a computer security office to the skills and knowledge she developed through her volunteer work in a police department. Here, she described how her hands-on volunteer experience helped her build skills and knowledge in forensics:

There were some of the funniest things where they will throw a box in front of you and say, figure out what this is and make it work and then when you’re done making it work, go ahead and plug it into that computer and see what you can get out of that for me. And I’m just like, what? Who? So now looking back on it I knew that he meant he needed an exact bit-wise copy which is a forensic image for me to go ahead use into – put in my own computer to extract some information for a case that he had. But he didn’t use any of those words. He just said, here’s this box, figure it out.

Megan then described the ways hands-on learning coupled with skill-based learning strengthened her knowledge base and was transferred to her job. She explained:

Let's put it this way, without getting them in trouble, I pretty much had very similar access to what the officers had. So I worked alongside and just about everybody was great. I think there was probably one person that I'm not sure was a fan of me because he just didn't seem like he's a fan of anybody. But they would have me work alongside. I mean anything from like a car situation, looking up cases and learning how to build a case. And then when I started at the other company, same exact process, learning how to build a case, working alongside their analysts and then going through their security program and that's how I ended up with this job in this computer security program by then.

Thus, Megan was able to directly transfer both skills and knowledge in forensics and security into a future employment role. It should also be noted that Megan entered her volunteer role specifically wanting to learn these different skills, and the volunteer role was able to accommodate these needs.

Similarly, Anthony, an educator, described how his teaching skills were strengthened through opportunities to teach in a volunteer capacity over the years. Specifically, the types of skills he developed included "the class facilitation; the way in which I construct the lesson; the way in which I kind of create visuals, and help people get engaged. I can use some of those sort of tactics, and other techniques." He believed that these skills acquired through his volunteer provided professional development and were transferrable toward his paid jobs, where he also taught youth. He explained:

Youth Voices has helped me out with my professional life as an educator; because it's enhanced how I can teach what I need to teach them. It broadens my knowledge base. And so when I'm going through lessons and talking about things, I just have a wider knowledge base from which to pull to explain things. A lot of the folk that I work with at Youth Voices are like the kinds of folk that show up in my classrooms. And so that knowledge is transferable.

However, the transfer of skills and knowledge in specific field to a paid position was rare in the study sample. More frequently, participants developed general skills and knowledge that were transferrable to employment across multiple industries or field. For instance, Colleen explained how as a volunteer canvasser and organizer she developed

skills related to networking and communication that were transferrable and “helped me get a couple jobs at different times.” She said:

Oh, when I was a canvasser – I had to know how – I had to learn how to knock on the door and not be afraid to ask. I’ve done little things with different agencies, just teaching fundraising classes. Teaching people how to do an ad book; stuff like that. They told me to get money donations, and in-kind donations and it’s helped me meet people on the way too.

Colleen also explained how she leveraged her knowledge as a community organizer to demonstrate that she was qualified for a position at a workforce development organization, even though she did not meet all of the job requirements and qualifications.

She explained:

I had to convince them that they’re hiring me when I’m not bilingual which is what they really wanted, and then I had to bring in community resources to get donations, et cetera. I had to get community resources to get free GED and parenting and get books and materials and everything. I got everything donated. Then I had to get people who were not attending any type of parent meetings. I mean their parent participation was so low to start coming to meetings and volunteering in classrooms.

Colleen brought the skills she cultivated as an organizer to the workforce development organization and demonstrated that she was capable of coordinating GED and parenting courses. She was successful because she was able to draw the human capital assets she accrued through her community organizing work. The general skills and broad knowledge she developed through her civic work were applicable across multiple types of organizations and institutions.

Participants also mentioned using their soft skills to navigate employment prospects. For instance, through her advocacy work in the housing rights community, Helen “learned to ask questions.” She believed that the confidence she developed around asking questions led her apply to a position with the government where she was paid more money. She explained:

Because when I got a job with the government department of housing I went for something higher. I thought about the consequences of my decision-making. Should I take this job that's going to pay me this amount of money and have that set of values, or should I take this job that's going to benefit the whole family and I still not lose anything.

The soft skills Helen learned through civic engagement made her less timid about asking questions, which influenced her decision to apply for a job that paid more.

***Human capital's influence on future economic opportunities.*** Participants also described the ways the skills and knowledge acquired through civic engagement were assets that could influence future economic opportunities. Specifically, participants described these assets in the context of civic engagement as an investment, a signaling opportunity for future employers, and as providing transferrable skills and knowledge for the future. Alignment between civic engagement, human capital, and employment was also stated an important feature that could successfully bridge civic engagement and economic opportunities.

***Viewed civic engagement as an investment.*** Eight study participants viewed their involvement in civic engagement as an investment that would pay off in the future. These participants described the ways accruing skills and resources now could provide future economic benefits. For instance, when asked what she thought she would get out of her community organizing work, Maya said, "Hopefully a job. Hopefully. I mean I'm only working part time but when I'm ready to commit to a full-time job perhaps these skills I can use as leeway into a job. That's what I'm hoping for." Similarly, when Michael was asked whether and how the time he put into his volunteer work would pay off, he explained, "Yeah, it's going to. It just takes a lot of time. It's just that right now, it's, it's a time where you're not getting money it's putting money in, putting money in, so, you're not, you got a bill before you know you can regenerate all that."



Indeed, Michael, who recently started his own business, described the ways the hard skills he accessed as a volunteer at an arts organization helped him grow his own business. Additionally, Michael knew the organization had human capital and physical resources that could help him learn how to grow his company, and explained how he used these resources to inform the direction of his business:

I went there every day and when they opened and I was out when they closed every single day. And because, at the end of the day, I knew what I wanted to do, they had the resources for it, so I used it like my office. And I had, you know, calls coming in and doing networking and all that. I would volunteer as far as I would get on music and do beats with people and I would get on, like, they got they own youth group that, that's Music Leads, like, group and they like, try to promote. You know, and I was on a couple of albums with them, but I really was making, was creating my business there.

Michael, who saw his music business as a “ticket out” of poverty, invested his time learning about the music industry and modeled aspects of his own business after what he learned in the organization.

Study participants also viewed other physical resources within their organizations, specifically computers, as a means toward shaping their human capital and future job prospects. For instance, Liz mentioned that access to a computer in her volunteer work both improved her computer skills and helped with her job search because she did not have a computer at home. Additionally, Jenny saw the time she put in as a volunteer at a technology organization as an investment because she would receive a computer at the end of her volunteer term, which she believed would help her find a job. By investing time in their respective organizations, these two women were able to access human capital and an important physical asset that could influence their future employment.

*Providing signals to employers.* Consistent with the civic engagement literature, participants also believed that their involvement in civic activities could signal the

presence of skills or abilities to future employers (Ziemek, 2006). Specifically, participants believed that their improved resumes and interview skills could signal employability. For instance, Pam said she could highlight the following skills on her resume after serving as a community organizer:

I'm not afraid to speak in public. I am a people person. I keep saying that. I am very much a people person. How I am able to get the word out. I am not afraid to speak in front of a judge and tell him what's going on, in front of the Senate. I am not afraid to let people know what's going on. By me just using the words that I have been to the state house and I have spoken in front of the senate, all those I can highlight. I think my resume's gonna be really nice, seeing that.

Jenny also believed that the skills she developed through volunteering looked “great on a resume.” While Jenny did not have a resume prior to volunteering, she was part of a jobs program at her homeless shelter that required her to volunteer. She described how the program helped her with her resume:

It's helped me learn how to – a resume, I guess. I mean I always knew how to write one, but not this good. It's helped me – I never knew what a cover letter was. You know just things like job skills and things like that.

In addition, Jenny believed that the opportunities she had to socialize with others as a volunteer made her “more at ease in interviews with socialization. It puts me in the mindset of what I've got to do.” Similarly, Ray explained that the civic organization he volunteered for helped him put together a resume, a document he did not have prior to volunteering. Ray, who was on parole, also received help from people in the organization in preparing for future interviews. He explained:

They'll tell us what to use, and stuff like that on an interview, or how to speak, what not to say. Then like, from time to time, they'll give us a minute to stand in front of everybody. Basically, like they told us – they taught us always tell them you have moved forward. You have changed or something like that. Or like, not just say basically that – that like you're trying to be a better person, or something like that, because that looks like you're still struggling with it, basically.

Through programs in the community coupled with volunteer opportunities, both Jenny and Ray were provided with access to help with their resumes and information about interview strategies.

Civic engagement also provided access to hard and soft skills that participants believed could help them during an interview. For instance, Maya, a community organizer, found that her civic work provided opportunities to improve her customer service, fundraising, and organizing skills. She believed these opportunities strengthened her interview skills and could increase her likelihood of obtaining a job. She explained:

I am starting to realize the customer service a bit is definitely something that I've learned and gotten a whole lot better at through the book sales, through bake sales, through this and that, fundraising events. That's definitely always a good skill to have when looking for a job. And interviewing skills, that's something I've been learning because I said before that I was really quiet at Ground Up and found myself around and then letting out my personality bit by bit. That helps because when you do interviews, to be comfortable with yourself is a big thing and then to show them that you're confident in yourself but also professional at the same time that's a great asset to have as well.

Maya's example demonstrated that skills accessed through civic engagement could be transferrable to the interview.

*Transferrable skills and knowledge for future employment opportunities.* Study participants believed the skills and knowledge they accessed through their civic roles could transfer to future employment and career opportunities. For instance, James was a 48-year old man who organized community events and festivals for the city. He discussed the ways his event planning skills, which gained through his civic work in the community, could be transferrable to a future job in the private sector:

I mean, the corporate world, of course events are very important, knowing the logistics of, of, you know, those type of endeavors can be applied, I think in all different types of, you know, professions. Well, not professions, because it's pretty much the same profession, but all, in, a lot of different, in a lot of different areas they apply the same, you know, the same managing technique.

James viewed each of his events as a project, and believed his project management skills could be transferred into the corporate world.

Participants also desired to use the skills they developed to start their own businesses or organizations. For instance, Tracy believed she could use the soft skills (e.g., people skills) she accrued through her volunteer work to help her reach her goal of starting her own business. She explained:

Well, I would love to start my own business. I wanna be an entrepreneur. That's my ultimate goal. And the way that I see the skills that I've learned to work with people, I've learned to develop strategies based on people's needs and where people are at in life. And I would like help build other people's skills to work along with me in my future business.

Other participants described an interest in bringing their knowledge from their civic work into a job in a similar industry or field. For instance, Phil, who was involved in political work for over three decades, had a goal of working on an election campaign. He believed his “communication skills” and “people power” could help him reach this goal and run a successful campaign. Similarly, Charles desired to bring his knowledge from his organizing work – in which he was a volunteer and a part-time employee – to a job at the city. He said:

Well, that's something that I've been working on, getting a job with the city. With his particular thing I'm working on, yeah, I think I can. I think I can be able to show the indicators of what the city needs to work and what Providence is looking for.

Through their advocacy and organizing work, both Phil and Charles believed they had accrued substantial knowledge and information about politics that equipped them for a job in the public sector.

*Alignment between civic experience, human capital, and job goals.* Participants discussed the need for proper alignment between the skills and knowledge accessed

through their civic engagement and future job goals. As demonstrated through Megan's experience volunteering at the police station, alignment between a volunteer civic engagement opportunity, access to knowledge and skills of interest to the participant, as well as alignment with future job goals successfully influenced employment opportunities.

However, for some participants, their interests changed over time, which required the conditions of the civic engagement activity to also change. For instance, Robert initially entered his AmeriCorps volunteer position with plans to become a teacher, but soon realized he was more interested in data collection. His volunteer placement accommodated his needs and allowed him to shadow a woman in the organization who worked with data, who became his mentor. He explained:

After teaching for one hour a day, I was like I can't do this. I found myself almost cheating the kids 'cause I was like I don't have the energy for this. So it really affirmed that I'm not gonna be a teacher. But then, when it was number crunching or doing science process skills evaluations, I was like – I actually found – to the point where I was like oh, wait, we were supposed to leave already? Oh, okay. I was like okay, this is fun. Then doing the data collection was like wow, this is really fun. I found it really enjoyable. It wasn't just – there were certain times where I was like I'll just shadow, and I'll be like oh, this could be fun, but then I actually did work – did the methodologies or the research, and I was like wow, I can actually do this. People don't – obviously, when you're doing research, it's like oh, people are not being nice to you. It's like okay, whatever. But then engaging in actual conversation with people when you're doing data collection, it was really, really – it was more enjoyable than teaching, for sure.

However, not all organizations or institutions were able to accommodate individual participants in the same way as AmeriCorps could with Robert. In more informal community organizing work, for instance, individuals had clear goals and interests, but the organization did not have the resources to accommodate the individual needs of the civic actors. In most cases, the needs of the community came before the professional development needs of the individual.

## **Social Capital, Human Capital, and Economic Opportunity**

“I had definitely a big assortment of jobs but all of my jobs have come through some form of volunteering.”

—Megan, 31-year-old volunteer, activist, and community leader

The interviews revealed several ways social and human capital worked together within civic activities to influence economic opportunities. The following section includes an examination of the major themes related to how access to both types of capital influenced economic opportunities. Participants described the power of the presence of both social and human capital assets, which worked together to influence each other and strengthen asset-building potential.

**Social capital as a pathway toward human capital.** In more than five instances during the interviews, participants mentioned the ways connections through civic engagement influenced opportunities to obtain a credential, most frequently a license or certification in a professional field or vocation. For instance, Barb, a hairdresser, had not renewed her license to style and cut hair for several years, but spent the past four years volunteering in her daughter’s (vocational) school teaching students how to style hair. She developed a close relationship with the teachers at the school and described them as “like another family.” The teachers did not know Barb went school for hairdressing, but offered to help Barb renew her license. She shared the story:

One day, one of the teachers was like, you’re too much of a perfectionist. I’m like, what are you talking about? She was like – like she sits back, and she watched me. Like say, this part, this girl’s hair, she was like the only way she would know that is if she was a hairdresser. So that’s how she found out. She was like, you have your license? I’m like I had them. They’re like, why don’t you go back. We’ll help you. I’m like so you’re going to help me? So she was like, we’re going to go through the steps to get you back in there, if you have to go take the state boards, and the whole nine. Because I just – I had it, and I just didn’t know – like, I didn’t renew them [the licenses]. So they helped me go through my steps to get them, and now, I have an opportunity of – I can go open my own salon, if I want to now. Where I – you know like, everybody needs that

little extra helping hand. Somebody gave it to me, and so, why can't I give something back to everybody else? So that got me back on the track with doing hair.

Barb remained in touch with the teacher and continued to do hair demonstrations on a volunteer basis, even though she could be paid. She mentioned that she occasionally got paid for doing hair now that she had her license. Barb demonstrated that access to a bonded social tie coupled within a volunteer network influenced access to human capital.

In addition, Liz was a 29-year-old nursing student who grew up in a public housing community and worked as a home health aide. She remained connected to the civic life old neighborhood and through her volunteer work heard about an opportunity to get certified to work in a nursing home. She explained that while the certification program was short, it provided specific types of training that expanded her nursing skills through "book material" and "hands-on experience." Liz explained:

We volunteered at a nursing home for a whole week before we graduated and – yeah, they helped us just learn all the basics of being an aide. An example, the proper way of feeding, the safety, what to check for as far as ulcers and their care, going along their care plans and their treatment, following along the treatment plans, assisting them, how to properly assist them, getting out of places like as far as cars, hallways, doors, chairs, getting up and down, things like that. That was a skill that I had to learn. So while I was going there to get my certificate we did the volunteer work at the nursing home.

Later, because Liz received certificate and skills, she obtained a job in a nursing home.

She mentioned that when she applied for the job, she drew on the skills she learned as a volunteer:

...it just helped me just to know what to expect of the nursing home, like what they're expecting of me as an aide. So when she was asking some of my qualifications I was actually able to say, well, I did this, I did that, I learned to do this and I learned to do that.

Therefore, through Liz's experience volunteering in her neighborhood, she gained access to a program that helped her acquire a certification. Through this program, she

volunteered in a nursing home and developed skills that helped her obtain a job in a nursing home.

Both of the women in these examples heard about an opportunity to obtain a certification through a person connected to their civic role, and accessed human capital along the way.

**Both connections and skills provided access to employment opportunities.**

Participants also described the ways social and human were used together to provide access to employment. For instance, Tracy described the ways her involvement with several different civic activities and projects helped her obtain work. She described the ways both social capital (e.g., references) and human capital (e.g., grant writing) through civic engagement worked together to influence employment:

It [civic engagement] has helped me with getting connections to employment or job openings that people might know about that I might be qualified for to tell me about them. Or skills that I have obtained, like I said grant writing to use that as a skill that I've mastered. I've mastered that skill. And the references that I have 'cause I follow through. I have a history with a lot of these organizations, and so I know that I have some really good references from people I worked with on multiple projects.

However, Tracy explained that although she regularly saw job postings for which she had the skills, she was limited in her capacity to work full-time due to her student status. She said:

There's certain skills that I've mastered as working as a volunteer. Like I was saying, the grant writing, the budget management, budget creation, outreach; those are all skills that I've acquired that are part of – can be attributed to other job positions. Actually many that I've – NonProfit Jobs (NPJ) – NPJ is a listserv at a local university for non-profit openings and I've been seeing many, many, many, many jobs that I'm qualified for that I've applied for based on the skills I've acquired. But because I'm a student right now and I can't do that kind of work – I can't go to school and go to work at the same time, I haven't been able to apply for them. But I'm very clear that the skills that I've acquired are definitely gonna help with me obtaining a job.



Thus, although Tracy could use her different networks, connections, and skills to hear about job openings, she was limited by the amount of time she had available.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Interview data demonstrated how access to social and human capital assets through civic engagement influenced economic opportunities for low-income study participants. Findings suggested that social and human capital were activated separately and together, which influenced economic outcomes and aspirations. However, in order for these assets to be successfully mobilized, they needed to be aligned with form of civic engagement and employment, career, or educational goals.

Study participants provided examples of the ways social capital resources – particularly through connections and shared networks – were accessed through civic engagement were activated into assets to obtain part- or full-time employment. Several participants also mentioned times when their status within an organization changed and they went from being a recipient of an organization’s services to a volunteer or employee. In addition, participants often described ways their education and career aspirations changed after becoming civically engaged, and mentioned ways they believed job references and resources could be used to reach their goals.

Additionally, participants explained how human capital resources such as soft skills, hard skills, and knowledge were mobilized to influence employment. Some study participants viewed civic engagement as an investment and described the ways accruing human capital resources could be transferred to future employment or business opportunities. Participants also believed that their involvement in civic activities could

signal the presence of skills or abilities to future employers through their resumes and interviews.

The findings in this chapter confirmed that social and human capital could explain the relationship between civic engagement and economic outcomes, particularly for employment-, career-, and education-related outcomes. Indeed, participants described the power of the presence of both social and human capital assets during civic engagement, which often worked together to influence economic outcomes. The next chapter turns to a discussion and policy recommendations based on Chapters 4, 5, and 6, and also considers the implications of this study on the relationship between civic engagement, economic mobility, and low-income individuals.

## **Chapter 7. Discussion, Policy Recommendations and Conclusion**

### **Overview**

To what extent does participation in civic engagement affect economic outcomes for low-income individuals over time, and in what ways do economic outcomes vary by form of civic engagement? How does participation in civic engagement provide access to social and human capital assets for low-income individuals? How does access to social and human capital assets within a civic engagement opportunity influence economic opportunities? This concluding chapter revisits these research questions that framed the analysis, the state of the field regarding civic engagement and economic opportunity among low-income individuals, and the study's intended theoretical contributions. The principal focus of this chapter is on the major themes and findings the study has generated and their implications for theory, future research, and policy.

### **Discussion of Results**

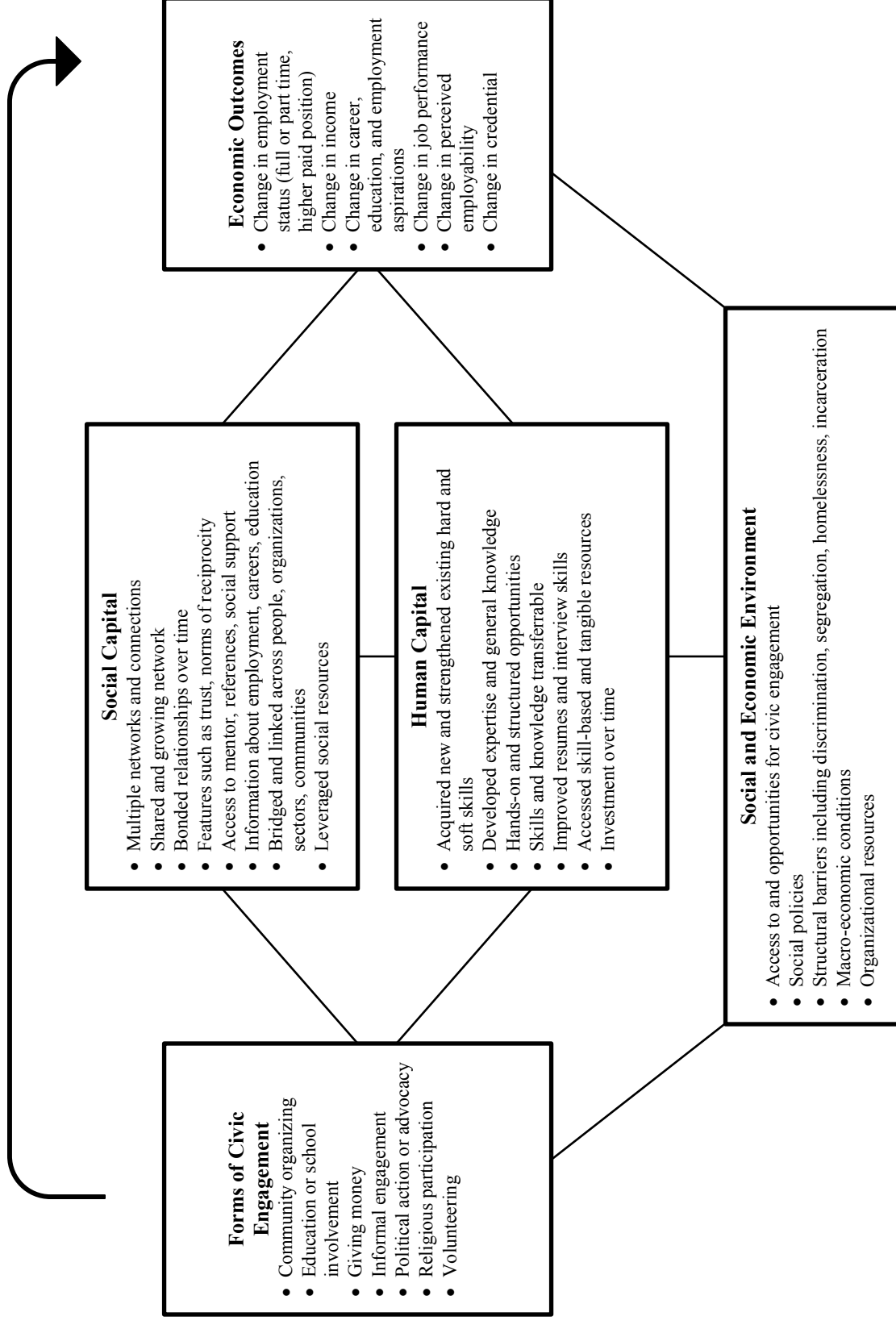
This dissertation examined a population that is underexplored in the context of civic engagement, low-income individuals. Although often perceived as solely recipients of community resources and services, this dissertation revealed that individuals from low-income households were active in their communities and participated in a wide range of civic engagement activities, which influenced economic opportunities. This study found that access to social and human capital assets through civic engagement explained part of

this relationship. Data showed that study participants mobilized the social and human capital assets accessed through civic engagement into employment and education opportunities, particularly when participants' civic experiences and future goals aligned with the assets accrued.

However, data also revealed that the conditions of the civic engagement experience coupled with structural factors influenced study participants' access to social and human capital more than the form of civic engagement itself. While most forms of civic engagement provided access to social and human capital resources, the conditions and capacity of a civic organization or group influenced whether these resources became assets. Moreover, structural barriers such as discrimination, homelessness, and incarceration diminished the potential value of these social and human capital resources, influencing whether resources could be activated into assets.

This section presents a thematic summary of the study's results, grouped according to the possible ways in which they contribute to research and theoretical development. Figure 6.1 presents an expanded version of the original conceptual framework that displays study findings.

**Figure 7.1.** Conceptual Framework with Study Findings



**A relationship existed between civic engagement and economic opportunity and this relationship was explained by access to social and human capital.** Both data sources in this study suggested a relationship between civic engagement and economic opportunity and highlighted ways access to social and human capital explained this relationship.

*Influence of civic engagement on employment or job opportunities.* Participation in civic engagement influenced the employment opportunities for many study participants. Participation in at least one form of civic engagement over time increased the odds of being employed; if a low-income went from not being civically engaged to being civically engaged, their odds of being employed increased by 31%.

Social and human capital assets accessed through civic engagement helped to explain this link; these assets accrued through civic engagement spilled over into employment and job opportunities for low-income individuals. Indeed, participants did not view their participation as a means to getting a job, but reported that they had opportunities to learn how to make connections and learn new skills that might influence job attainment in the future. Participants' networks were broadened, and for some individuals, civic engagement provided access to their first "positive" social network as an adult. Shared and diverse civic networks influenced opportunities to strategically use social capital to hear about and apply for employment opportunities. Access to caring adults, safe spaces, and mentorship opportunities shaped the career and educational aspirations of study participants; study participants were provided with access to role models who provided information about what the future could look like. Skills and knowledge were accessed through civic engagement that helped participants obtain or

qualify for a new job, or feel confident applying for a position that paid more money. Participants accessed human capital through hands-on learning, such as to learn event planning or budgeting, and structured opportunities to learn skills such as public speaking through community organizing. Civic engagement provided access to skills and knowledge that were transferrable to full- and part-time work; these skills were included on resumes and highlighted during interviews. Participants who were long-term volunteers strengthened their social and human capital assets over time, and believed these assets to be an investment that they could mobilize in the future.

However, the results of this study were limited in that they primarily assessed employment by others instead of self-employment. Future research has an opportunity to break down employment by different characteristics and types to understand additional ways social and human capital may serve as mediating factors toward future employment. For instance, additional research could examine whether individuals who are civically engaged become employed in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors, and which human capital assets might be valued in each of these sectors. Furthermore, economic opportunity goes beyond obtaining employment, as several jobs do not pay a living wage or provide benefits. Future research must be conducted to consider these additional factors that influence economic opportunity and mobility.

***Giving money to family or friends.*** One form of civic engagement that was tied to economic outcomes over time was giving money to family or friends. If an individual from a low-income household went from not giving money to family or friends to giving money to family or friends, their odds of being employed increased by 56% and giving over time was associated with a \$2,687 increase in total household income. One

explanation for this finding was that across each of the civic measures and waves, those who were civically engaged had a higher mean income than those were not civically engaged (see Table 4.7 in Chapter 4), but only 34% of quantitative participants (in Wave 1) and 39% of qualitative participants mentioned giving money to family or friend. In addition, it is possible that the giving took place after the increase in income, but the fixed effects model did control for time. It is also possible that other factors may contribute to this relationship, such as the type of organization in which money is exchanged (e.g., religious, non-religious).

Social capital theory may also explain this finding. For instance, trust and norms of reciprocity emerged as themes when participants described times they turned to, or could turn to, someone in a civic organization for money. Putnam (1993) would argue these individual acts of giving money were characterized by a combination of “short-term altruism” and “long-term self-interest,” meaning that benefiting others at a cost to the altruist in the short term could make every participant better off in the long run (p. 172). Coleman (1988) would suggest that the existence of strongly interconnected and mutually reinforcing relations between different actors in organizations or institutions maintained the existence of effective norms of reciprocity and trust, which strengthens social capital. As seen in the interview data, when a civic venue created conditions for study participants to access trust, study participants named individuals within that civic organization who they could turn to for monetary support if necessary.

An alternative explanation for this finding is that another pathway might exist by which civic engagement (and giving money to family or friends in particular) influences economic outcomes. For instance, civic engagement can lead to our physical health,



mental health, and self-efficacy, which in turn could lead to better economic outcomes. Panel data such as the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) could be used to explore this alternate explanation.

However, this finding suggested that study participants, despite their low-income status, *did* give money to family or friends. Future research must continue to explore this relationship with a wide range giving measures to better understand whether the type of giving (e.g., institutional, individual) influences economic outcomes. Indeed, while the quantitative question asked about money being given exclusively to family or friends, the qualitative data revealed that in addition to family and friends, participants also gave money to their church, an organization they were involved with, or and members of the community. Understanding what these factors might be require additional confirmatory research. In addition, although the *Making Connections* dataset was initially used because of its number of civic measures, other datasets such as the PSID (which contains a charitable giving measure), NLSY, and Add Health could be used for future research to further test and refine the conceptual framework used in this study.

**The conditions of the civic engagement experience itself mattered more than the form of civic engagement.** The quantitative data suggested that only one form of civic engagement, giving money to family or friends, was significantly related to employment and income. However, the qualitative data demonstrated that conditions, such as tenure within a civic role, civic learning environments, organizational resources

and structure, and alignment between civic engagement and goals were more likely to influence access to social and human capital than the form of civic engagement itself.

***Tenure in civic role.*** Consistent with the social capital literature, the longer a participant served in an organization or group, the more likely he or she mentioned access to features of bonded social capital such as trust (Putnam, 2000). Indeed, Putnam (1993, 1995) suggests that features of organizations such as norms, networks, and trust enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Putnam, 1993, 1995). Moreover, Becker (1993) would suggest that the longer one is a participant in a particular civic act, the more human capital they develop over time. Indeed, while the majority of participants did not enter their civic roles with the goal of learning new skills or knowledge, others developed goals once they entered a volunteer, community organizing, or political activity. Participants also strengthened their public speaking, communications, and listening skills over time. Over time, some participants became experts on a particular subject matter, such as housing rights, and others developed general skills such as grant writing. Future research could look into which type of skills accrued over time have value in terms of occupational and economic mobility.

***Civic learning environments.*** The ways social and human capital assets were delivered and accrued also mattered, both through formal and informal avenues. While several participants accessed new skills and knowledge through “hands-on” learning, others had formal opportunities to learn skills like community organizing through institutes or free classes. However, challenges arose when participants did not appreciate the way these skills were taught, particularly regarding how they aligned with the background of the organizer and the needs of the community.

***Organizational resources and structure.*** Not all civic organizations or groups had the resources to provide access to the same level of social and human capital. For instance, while some organizations provided participants with access to mentors who catered to the interests of their AmeriCorps VISTAs, other AmeriCorps sites were not structured to provide social resources to their AmeriCorps VISTAs. In addition, participants who volunteered in organizations that had the resources to send their volunteers to local or out-of-state conferences mentioned bridging social capital, but not all organizations had these resources. Future research would benefit from the study of this issue from an organizational perspective. Because findings suggest that civic venues did, in fact, provide access to social and human capital, it is equally important to understand the ways organizations differed. Given what was learned in this study about the value of social and human capital assets toward economic opportunity, the connection between these ideas requires more attention.

***Alignment between civic engagement and goals.*** The quality of the civic engagement experience influenced economic outcomes for low-income individuals. This finding was consistent with the service-learning literature, suggesting that the degree to which the civic engagement experience provided opportunities that were consistent with the needs and goals of the participant was linked to access to social and human capital more than the form of civic engagement (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005; Billig, 2009; Spring, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006). While some study participants had opportunities to volunteer in an organization that aligned with their career goals, this experience was very rare. However, alignment did occur, study participants were able to strategically seek out

social and human capital assets, and mobilize these assets toward their future employment and career goals.

**Structural barriers diminished the potential value of these social and human capital resources, influencing whether resources could be activated into assets.** Study participants experienced challenges related to discrimination, homelessness, incarceration, and access to civic engagement opportunities, which influenced whether they could access assets through civic engagement. While these barriers influenced the access and mobilization of assets, civic engagement occasionally broke down some of these barriers.

*Value of assets varied in different community settings.* Even when assets were accessed through civic engagement, participants cited discrimination as influencing whether they were able to mobilize these assets. For instance, while a social network was an asset for participation within the context of the civic organization, once the participant was removed from that setting the asset lost some of its value. Future research must continue to explore the value of intangible assets across multiple contexts in tandem with civic engagement. In addition, one limitation of the data analysis in this study was that time-invariant variables could not be used as independent variables in a fixed effects model; however, in future work it would be possible to estimate the effects of the interaction of time-invariant and time varying measures (Johnson, 1995). These interactions could, for instance, test the effect of civic engagement on economic outcomes by race, gender, or housing status within the context of other policy variables.

*Civic engagement broke down some barriers, but not all.* Some participants described the ways civic engagement strengthened access to bonding social capital. For

instance, participants bonded through shared life experiences, and were able to access a loan or transportation to church through a close connection. Formerly incarcerated individuals connected with others in their civic role to secure employment. In addition, participants also received information about childcare or free meals through their civic experiences, which influenced whether they could take a particular job or return to school.

### **Policy Implications**

It is clear through this study's findings that participation in civic engagement has a significant impact on economic outcomes of low-income individuals, particularly employment. Moreover, participation in civic engagement has the potential to inform a strategy that influences the economic mobility of low-income individuals in the United States. This section provides a set of recommendations to policymakers and organizations regarding how the data from this study can be used to inform public and organizational policies. The results of this study have the potential to inform policies and programs in the civic engagement and poverty policy arenas.

**Integrate civic engagement into existing federal and state policies.** The earlier discussion of the effects of civic engagement on employment suggests a useful link between these two constructs. This finding is consistent with previous research on the topic (CNCS, 2013a), and suggests policies purposefully consider civic engagement as a part of existing labor, welfare, and workforce development policies at the national and state levels. In 2012 the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) issued a letter recognizing that active volunteering can help expand opportunities for unemployed individuals. Based on the findings in this study, it is recommended that the DOL: 1) continues these efforts and

consider other forms of civic engagement beyond volunteering, 2) ensures that the civic engagement experience provides access to social and human capital, 3) makes these civic opportunities more accessible to low-income individuals, 4) considers long-term civic engagement opportunities instead of static, short-term opportunities.

At the state level, policymakers must also consider the unique role civic engagement can play to support low-income individuals through welfare policies, such as TANF. Although not designed to civically engage individuals, policymakers must consider that the self-sufficiency model in current welfare policies is not a long-term solution toward economic mobility. Furthermore, as seen through this research, alignment between the interests, needs, and assets of low-income individuals is an important feature that influences economic opportunity. Policymakers must consider that low-income individuals are already involved in several forms of civic engagement that align with their interests and needs, which provide opportunities to access, build, and leverage human capital assets that are transferrable to future employment. It is possible that combined with job search or other welfare-to-work activities, certain types civic engagement that provide opportunities that draw on the strengths of individuals, develop transferrable work-related skills, and make connections could be a useful strategy for upward economic mobility (Herr, Wagner, & Halpern, 1996). This policy suggestion differs from existing welfare efforts in that it is designed to be a sustainable, long-term solution that leverages existing community assets to mobilize individuals toward economic opportunities. However, it is important to consider the potential policy feedback effects of a civic engagement program that is designed alongside TANF.

**Extend access to civic engagement through federal partnerships.** In 2013, President Obama established a task force on expanding national service. The purpose of this task force was a call for public-private partnerships, as well as partnerships across agencies, that use national service to solve the nation's most pressing challenges. Another purpose of creating these partnerships was to "identify ways in which the agency's national service participants and volunteers can develop transferable skills, and also how national service can serve as a pipeline to employment inside and outside the Federal Government" (CNCS, 2013b, p. 3). Several agencies and private organizations have responded to this call for service, including the U.S. Department of Education and Bank of America. The most recent program that was announced, Shriver Corps, will be working at LIFT sites to help "lift" people in low-income communities out of poverty.

As the primary agency that supports civic engagement in the country, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) continues to play a key role in providing opportunities for low-income individuals to become civically engaged. AmeriCorps is an example of a federal program that provides an opportunity to build social and human capital. Much of the civic engagement literature does not recognize AmeriCorps as a program for low-income individuals; it is primarily framed as an opportunity to help those in low-income communities. However, this study demonstrates that low-income individuals *are*, in fact, AmeriCorps participants and alumni, and not only recipients of services from volunteers who are a part of these programs.

When considering how to engage low-income individuals through AmeriCorps, the program must first recognize that there are volunteers who come of the communities the program intends to serve. Indeed, participants in this study described ways they

received opportunities for professional development through AmeriCorps, which provided access to social and human capital assets. However, also described were ways study participants would like to see their volunteer experience improve the ways social ties are strengthened within an organization and bridged throughout the community, which includes more opportunities to interact with those in an organization and longer terms of service.

Yet, there are not nearly enough individuals from low-income communities engaged in these formal opportunities. Consistent with previous research, study participants cite time, transportation, childcare, and other reasons as barriers to participation in AmeriCorps (McBride et al., 2006), which are similar to barriers to work for low-income individuals. Other participants cite lack of information about opportunities as reasons they are not engaged. However, research shows that making investments in individuals through federally funded civic engagement programs improves economic outcomes for volunteers (CNCS, 2008, 2013). Funding could be bolstered to provide more opportunities in communities, in general. Furthermore, the agency could consider reframing its programs in a way that recognizes low-income individuals as active participants in improving lives, strengthening communities, and fostering civic engagement instead of solely perceiving people living in poverty as recipients of services. Reframing civic engagement rejects the notion that there is a lack of participation of people living in poverty and can redefine horizons of possibilities for all individuals living in the United States.

**Expand civic opportunity through local efforts.** With limited resources and political capital at the federal and state levels, the most important place to focus civic



opportunity efforts is at the local level. CNCS has begun to invest in geographic regions through such as Appalachia through the Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR), where AmeriCorps VISTA members will volunteer in areas of jobs, youth, education, and health and human services and build nonprofit capacity. However, it is also important for local government to establish public-nonprofit partnerships, as well as public-private partnerships, to fund additional opportunities to build capacity within civic organizations in lower-income communities. For example, this study suggested that access to bridging social capital occurred through opportunities to meet others from different races, socioeconomic statuses, and organizations; however, most study participants were involved in organizations that could not provide opportunities for accessing this kind of social capital. Building capacity within organizations will provide more opportunities for individuals to access both social and human capital, but more research must be done on this topic to understand how organizations and institutions can best serve as civic venues for economic opportunity.

In addition, local government must continue to support and fund grassroots initiatives, nonprofit organizations, and civic infrastructure in low-income communities. Research demonstrates that cities that have a stronger civic infrastructure have better economic outcomes as a whole, and this study shows that those organizations that create the conditions to access social and human capital influence economic opportunity for low-income individuals. Local organizations and community foundations also have the potential to invest in the civic infrastructure of low-income neighborhoods and communities, particularly in asset-building initiatives that provide civic pathways toward economic opportunities for low-income individuals.

Local business can also play a role in expanding opportunity for low-income individuals. Suggestions may include workplace-based volunteer opportunities could be expanded to include hourly and low-wage workers, not just major corporations (Zaff, Youniss, & Gibson, 2009). Stipends or education subsidies could provide incentives in exchange for civic engagement, modeling federally funded youth-corps service programs and providing another access point for civic engagement among low-wage earners (McBride, Gonzales, Morrow-Howell, & McCrary, 2011; PACE, 2010). Partnerships between local businesses, government, and nonprofit organizations could provide transportation and childcare to civic opportunities to make it easier for people without these resources to become civically engaged.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This study suggested that civic engagement does have economic value for low-income individuals, and that social and human capital help to explain this relationship. The analysis of data in this dissertation has made useful contributions toward understanding the ways civic engagement influences economic opportunities, and recognizes the challenges that remain for low-income individuals in the context of civic engagement opportunities, social and human capital assets, and economic mobility. However, to understand these relationships more fully, this study has led to an additional set of research questions that deserve further inquiry. Some of these questions include the following: Which types of “giving” influence economic opportunities for low-income individuals? In what ways do organizations serve as “civic venues” of economic opportunity for low-income individuals? How does civic engagement influence different types of employment? Can a theory be built to examine the relationship between the

forms of civic engagement – particularly considering sequencing, entry points, whether the forms build on each other, or linearity? Is receiving an economic benefit from civic engagement a predictor of deeper, future, or different forms of civic engagement? How does inequality in a community influence economic mobility for low-income individuals who are civically engaged?

This study suggests that civic engagement provides access to social and human capital, which for many study participants influenced their economic opportunities. The policy strategies outlined in this chapter aim to begin the conversation about improving economic opportunities for low-income individuals in the United States, a conversation that should be ongoing. A policy strategy that seeks to integrate civic engagement into existing federal and state policies, provides access to civic engagement through partnerships, and expands civic opportunity through local efforts would provide more low-income individuals with access to civic opportunities. As the public, private, and nonprofit sectors develop policies toward economic mobility for low-income individuals, this research contributes to new knowledge about the ways civic engagement could serve as a mechanism to influence economic opportunity.

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## Appendix A

**Table A.1.** Quantitative Data Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables by Wave

Variable	Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3	
	Description	N	Description	N	Description	N
<b>Demographic/Control Variables</b>						
<i>Age and Gender</i>						
Age (mean)	40 (15.879)	1,063	41 (15.392)	1,136	43 (15.304)	1,136
Female	77%	841	79%	905	81%	931
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>						
Hispanic/Latino	51%	320	63%	469	64%	484
Other Race/Ethnicity	42%	337	47%	326	40%	360
White/Caucasian	39%	359	33%	355	43%	389
Black/African American	15%	344	17%	370	16%	361
Native American/Alaska Native	3%	27	2%	27	2%	32
Asian	2%	44	2%	41	2%	45
<i>Education</i>						
High school graduation/GED or higher	57%	693	58%	720	59%	727
<i>Family structure</i>						
Spouse in housing unit	48%	469	44%	426	44%	430
Children in household	72%	832	73%	840	73%	823
<i>Homeownership</i>						
Own house	30%	294	28%	284	31%	321

Variable	Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3	
	Description	N	Description	N	Description	N
<i>Public Assistance</i>						
Received SNAP/Food Stamps	37%	488	48%	548	42%	507
Received TANF/Welfare	42%	468	46%	480	40%	417
<b>Civic Engagement Variables</b>						
Volunteered in last 12 months	25%	311	26%	324	28%	327
Served as an officer	10%	135	12%	149	11%	147
Spoke with political official	15%	200	15%	198	12%	155
Spoke with religious leader	13%	169	11%	154	10%	126
Got together to fix problem	22%	284	24%	307	19%	245
Gave financial help	34%	416	33%	401	32%	390
Overall civic engagement	60%	691	62%	732	58%	686
<b>Dependent Variables</b>						
<i>Employment</i>						
Employed	49%	547	52%	559	50%	547
<i>Income (Categorical)</i>						
\$0-\$4,999	14%	179	6%	89	5%	60
\$5,000-\$9,999	17%	170	25%	283	19%	216
\$10,000-\$14,999	19%	190	18%	190	15%	144
\$15,000-\$19,999	17%	154	16%	190	12%	120
\$20,000-\$24,999	12%	111	11%	121	11%	118
\$25,000-\$29,999	8%	66	9%	101	10%	92
\$30,000+	14%	144	15%	165	27%	270



Variable	Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3	
	Description	N	Description	N	Description	N
<i>Income (Continuous)</i>						
Dollar amount (median)	n/a	n/a	\$15,000 (11,219.94)	1,139	\$18,000 (17,543.02)	1,020

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> All descriptive statistics are weighted. N's are unweighted.

<sup>2</sup> Standard deviations are shown in parenthesis for continuous variables.

<sup>3</sup> Survey asked respondents whether they identify as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, but N's were too low to report.

**Table A.2.** Qualitative Data Descriptive Statistics

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18-30	8	26%
31-40	5	16%
41-50	6	19%
51-60	7	23%
61-70	5	16%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	14	45%
Female	17	55%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Asian American	1	3%
Black/African American	15	48%
Latino/Hispanic	5	16%
Multiracial/Multiethnic	5	16%
White/Caucasian	5	16%
<b>Education</b>		
Less than high school/GED	4	13%
Completed high school/GED	10	32%
Some college	11	35%
College graduate	5	16%
Masters degree	1	3%
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	2	6%
Separated	2	6%
Single	7	23%
Divorced	18	58%
Widow	2	6%
<b>Children</b>		
Yes	20	65%
No	11	35%
<b>Residence status</b>		
Apartment	17	55%
Government assisted housing	4	13%
House	2	6%
Own	1	3%
Rent	6	19%
Other	1	3%
<b>Public assistance</b>		
Yes	18	58%
No	11	35%

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Religious affiliation</b>		
Yes	16	52%
No	15	48%
<b>Employment status</b>		
Employed full-time	5	16%
Employed part-time	8	26%
Unemployed and looking for a job	4	13%
Unemployed and not looking for a job	1	3%
Volunteer	10	32%
Other	3	10%
<b>Income status (annual)</b>		
\$10,000 or less	4	13%
\$10,001 to \$20,000	4	13%
\$20,001 to \$30,000	1	3%
\$30,001 to \$40,000	2	6%
\$40,001 or higher	1	3%
<b>Income status (monthly)</b>		
\$500 or less	4	13%
\$501 to \$1,000	7	23%
\$1,001 to \$1,500	3	10%
\$1,501 or higher	1	3%

## Appendix B

### Consent Form – Participant Interview Civic Engagement Study *Revised December 9, 2013*

**Participant's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Project Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Principal Investigator:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Student Investigator:** \_\_\_\_\_

**This consent form is valid from** \_\_\_\_\_ **through** \_\_\_\_\_.

You are invited to take part in an interview for a study by researchers at the Brandeis University Heller School for Social Policy and Management.

**Purpose of this study:** The purpose of this study is to learn more about individuals who are involved in their communities through various activities.

**Reason why you have been selected for this study:** You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been involved in your community in various ways. You have the choice to talk with us or not. If you take part in this interview, you can skip certain questions or topics if you prefer. You may end the interview at any time.

**Period of participation:** If you choose to participate, the interview will last about one hour.

**Procedures (what we will do):** We will ask you questions about your experiences with various activities in your community. We will also ask about things that have happened in your life during and after participating in these activities, such as people you have met, things you have learned, and your employment status. If it is okay with you, we will record the interview using an audio recorder. We will also take notes.

**Compensation:** You will receive \$20 in compensation for the time you have spent participating in the interview.

**Possible risk:** Because we are asking questions about your personal experiences, it is possible that some of the things we discuss will cause you stress. You may ask to see the questions before deciding whether to participate in this study. If you feel uncomfortable about a particular topic, you can ask to change the subject or stop the interview at any time. The researcher can discuss these risks with you before you decide whether or not to participate in the study.

**Possible benefits:** This research will not help you directly, but what we learn may help others. This interview is an opportunity for participants in community engagement activities to talk about their experiences.

**Costs:** Other than your time and any expenses related to using a telephone or transportation, you will not have added any costs from being in this study.

**Period of authorization:** Your authorization will expire at the end of the study. The study will end by August 20, 2015.

**Questions about the research:** The Principal Investigator of the study is Thomas Shapiro, who can be reached at (781) 736-4671 or tshapiro@brandeis.edu. The Student Investigator of this study is Jodi Benenson, who can be reached at (763) 443-1325 or benenson@brandeis.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject please contact the Brandeis University Institutional Review Board at (781) 736-8133 or irb@brandeis.edu.

**Privacy and confidentiality:** When we write up the results of our interviews, we will not use your name to identify things that you have said. However, there is a small chance that others will be able to identify you based on what you say in the interview. We will do our best to protect your confidentiality, but we cannot promise that everything you say will be entirely confidential. The Brandeis University Institutional Review Board is responsible for making sure that researchers follow federal laws to protect research participants. The Institutional Review Board can ask to look at any of our records to make sure that we are protecting your confidentiality.

**Audio recording:** We are asking for your permission to allow us to audio record this interview as a part of the research study. If you consent to the audio recording, all information that is audio recorded will be confidential, your name will never be attached to the recording, and a unique identifier will be associated with your audio recording. If you do not consent to the audio recording, the interviewer will take notes, all notes will be confidential, your name will never be attached to the notes, and a unique identifier will be associated with the notes.

Your signature below documents your permission to take part in this interview.

I consent to be audio recorded: ☐ Yes ☐ No

A signed and dated copy of this form will be given to you.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Certification of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

The person has been informed of:

1. The procedure, purpose, and risks of the study as described above;
2. How his/her information may be used, shared, and reported; and
3. His/her privacy rights.

The participant has been provided with a signed copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining informed consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Civic Engagement and Economic Mobility Demographic Intake Form

*Revised August 2, 2013*

**Birth date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Current age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Transgender

**How would you describe your race/ethnicity?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Highest education level:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Marital status:**

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Single
- ☐ Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you have children?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**Do you affiliate with a religion or a religious community?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**If yes, what religion or religious community?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Residence status (mark all that apply):**

- ☐ House
- ☐ Apartment
- ☐ Government assisted housing
- ☐ Rent
- ☐ Own
- ☐ Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**How many years and months have you lived at your current residence?**

Years: \_\_\_\_\_

Months: \_\_\_\_\_

**How many years and months have you lived in your current neighborhood?**

Years: \_\_\_\_\_

Months: \_\_\_\_\_

**Employment Status (mark all that apply):**

☐ Employed Full-time

☐ Employed Part-time

☐ Unemployed and looking for a job

☐ Unemployed and not looking for a job

☐ Volunteer

☐ Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**If employed, what is your job title(s)?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your annual and monthly income?**

Annual income: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Monthly income: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you receive financial assistance or other assistance from the government?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**If yes, what type of assistance?** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Civic Engagement and Economic Mobility

#### Interview Guide

*Revised August 2, 2013*

Thank you for participating in this interview. This interview is a part of a dissertation project and we are interested in understanding more about your experiences with different activities in your community like volunteering, giving money, political activities, school involvement, religious participation, or neighborhood activities. **This interview is confidential and the interview recordings/notes are kept private. We will not use your name or any information that could identify you in any of our reports.**

#### Civic Engagement Questions (Including Questions about Access/Opportunities)

Please describe all of the ways you are involved in your community.

- How long have you been involved in each of these activities?
- Why did you get involved in these activities? Organizations?
- How did you hear about these activities? Organizations?
- What other ways do you help in your community? Why?

Please describe the different things you do in this community activity. *[Provide this prompt for each activity individual is involved in.]*

- Which of these activities interest you the most? Why?
- Which of these activities do you dislike, if at all? Why?

Tell me more about how you learn about ways to get involved in your community.

- What are some easy ways to learn about things going on in the community?
- Do you ever have challenges getting involved in your community? Can you tell me about these? *[Include prompts about resources including transportation, costs, etc.]*

Do you feel like there are enough ways to get involved in the community? *[Include prompts about different the dearth or surplus of ways to get involved.]*

- What types of opportunities would you add? Why would you add these opportunities?

#### Social Capital Questions

Tell me about the people you have met through these activities. *[Provide this prompt for each activity individual is involved in.]*

- Do you feel like you know these people well? *[Include prompts about how well.]*
- What have you learned from these people?
- How frequently do you see these individuals? Talk to them?
- Do you see these individuals outside of the community activity?
- [If answer have not met anyone]: Why haven't you met anyone through this activity?
  - Would you like to meet others? Why?
  - In what ways do you think the activity would facilitate these things?



Have people you have met through this activity helped you meet others? *[Provide this prompt for each activity individual is involved in.]*

- Can you tell me more about the people you have met? What are their backgrounds?
- Have these people helped you in any way? Are they reliable? Do you trust them? Why?
- Have you helped any of these people? If so, please describe a time you have helped them.

How do different activities provide different opportunities to meet different kinds of people?

- Which people have been the most beneficial for you to meet? Why?
- What are some other ways you think meeting others has helped you in your personal and professional life? Please provide some examples.

### **Human Capital Questions**

Did you come into this community activity wanting to learn a new skill? *[Provide this prompt for each activity individual is involved in.]*

- Why were you interested in learning this skill?
- What did you think this skill could help you achieve?
- In what ways is learning this skill helpful for your life? Please provide some examples.

Tell me more about whether you learned a new skill, type of knowledge, or something new in your activity.

- How did learning this take place?
- Has it helped you at all in your life? Please provide some examples.
- What kind of challenges did you have in learning this skill?

What types of skills and knowledge did you bring to this activity?

- Where did you initially learn these skills and knowledge(s)?
- Did you help others learn these things?
- Did bringing these skills and knowledge make the experience better or worse? Why?

### **Economic Mobility Questions**

Please tell me about the different jobs you have held over the years.

- If you are employed, how long have you been in your current job?
- How did you get this job? *[Ask about friends, family, and other connections.]*
- How have you gotten other jobs in the past?

Please describe the different things you have done in your life to prepare for your jobs.

- Where have you developed the skills and knowledge necessary for this job?
- What are the qualifications for people in this role?

Do you have aspirations to obtain a different job in the future?

- Tell me more about how you think you can achieve this goal. *[Will follow up with prompts specific to the goal.]*

Has your participation in community activities helped you with employment at all? Income?

- Please provide some specific examples of the ways participation in [insert activity] has helped you reach these job goals.
  - What types of people (that may have been mentioned previously) through civic engagement activities have been beneficial for this purpose?
- What other types of things you can do in the community that might help you reach future employment goals?
- What other types of things can a community involvement experience provide that might help you reach your future employment goals?

What other ways has participation in community activities helped you in your life?

- Please provide some specific examples of the ways participation in [insert activity] has helped you in your life.

### **Closing Questions**

Is there anything else that I didn't ask you about that you think it is important for me to know?

Of all the things we talked about in this interview, what do you think is the most important information for me to know about your experiences in your community?

Thank you again for your participation in this interview.

## Appendix E

**Table A.3.** Key Variable Definitions in *Making Connections* Survey

Name	Label	Value Ranges	Transformed Value Ranges	Question	Final Type
<b>General Variables</b>					
wave_1_original_suid	Sampling Unit ID Number	String	N/A	N/A	Continuous
wave	Wave identifier	1=Wave 1, 2=Wave 2, 3=Wave 3	N/A	N/A	Categorical
whhpop_panel_wave123a	Household weight for Waves 1,2,3 Panel				
<b>Demographic/Control Variables</b>					
r_age	Respondent Age	String; -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused		What was age at (his/her) last birthday?	Continuous
respsex	Respondent Sex	1=Male, 2=Female, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Female, 0=Male		
hispanic	Respondent is Hispanic	1=No, not Latino/Spanish/Hispanic, 2=Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, 3= Yes, Puerto Rican, 4= Yes, Cuban, 5= Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino, 999=Uncodable, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	Do you consider yourself to be of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin or descent?	Dichotomous
navamrcn	Race - Native American or Alaska Native	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	What race do you consider yourself?	Dichotomous
asian	Race - Asian	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	What race do you consider yourself?	Dichotomous

Name	Label	Value Ranges	Transformed Value Ranges	Question	Final Type
black	Race - Black or African American	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	What race do you consider yourself?	Dichotomous
white	Race - White	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	What race do you consider yourself?	Dichotomous
raceelse	Race - Something Else	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	What race do you consider yourself?	Dichotomous
educhgst	R Level of Education	1=Eighth grade or less, 2=Beyond eighth grade but not high school graduation, 3=GED, 4=High school graduation, 5=Trade or vocational school, 6=One to three years of college, 7=Graduated four year college, 8=Some graduate education, 9=Graduate degree, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=High school graduation/GED or higher, 0=Less than a high school graduation	What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Dichotomous
spouse	Does R Have Spouse in HU	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	Does r have spouse in HU?	Dichotomous
numchld	Number of children in household	String; -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Children in household, 0=No children in household	Children under 18 in household	Dichotomous
ownhouse	Does R Own or Rent House	1=Own, 2=Buying, 3=Rent, 4=Rent to own, 5=Buying on contract, 6=Live here for free, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Own house, 0=Buy, rent, rent to own, buying on contract, or live here for free	Do you (and your spouse or partner) own this (house/apartment), rent it, or what?	Dichotomous
foodstmp	Received food stamps in last 12 months	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	In the past 12 months, have you (or anyone in your household) received food stamps?	Dichotomous

Name	Label	Value Ranges	Transformed Value Ranges	Question	Final Type
usedtanf	Use TANF or Welfare	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	Have you (or any member of your household) used (Place where you sign up for TANF or welfare) in the last (12 months)?	Dichotomous
<b>Independent Variables</b>					
volunter	Volunteered in last 12 months	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	Over the past 12 months, have you volunteered or helped out with activities in your community?	Dichotomous
officer	Served as an officer	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	In the past twelve months, have you served as an officer or served on a committee of any local club or organization or religious organization?	Dichotomous
spkpoltl	Spoken with political official	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	Have you (or any member of your household) spoken with a local political official like a city councilman, county supervisor, or state legislator about a neighborhood problem or improvement?	Dichotomous
spkreigs	Spoken with religious leader	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	Have you (or any member of your household) talked to a local religious leader or minister to help with a neighborhood problem or neighborhood improvement?	Dichotomous
getogetr	Gotten together to fix problem	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	Have you (or any member of your household) gotten together with neighbors to do something about a neighborhood problem or to organize neighborhood improvement?	Dichotomous
givehelp	Family give financial help	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	Sometimes families give financial help, either to other people they live with or to friends and family	Dichotomous

Name	Label	Value Ranges	Transformed Value Ranges	Question	Final Type
ce	Participation in at least one of the six forms of civic engagement		1=Yes, 0=No	outside. Did you give any financial help like this in the last 12 months? N/A	Dichotomous
<b>Dependent Variables</b>					
ivq1	Is R employed	1=Yes, 0=No, -5=Not Applicable, -4=Multiple, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused	1=Yes, 0=No	Is the respondent employed?	Dichotomous
income1	Total household income (wave 1)	1=\$0-\$4,999, 2=\$5,000-\$9,999, 3=\$10,000-\$14,999, 4=\$15,000-\$19,999, 5=\$20,000-\$24,999, 6=\$25,000-\$29,999, 7=\$30,000 or more, -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused		What was your total household income from all of these sources for the last 12 months?	Categorical
income2	Total household income (waves 2 and 3)	String: -3=Missing, -2=Don't Know, -1=Refused		What was your total household income from all of these sources for the last 12 months?	Continuous

## Appendix F

**Table A.4.** Paired Correlations Between Civic Engagement Independent Variables by Wave (Weighted)

	Volunteered in last 12 months	Served as an officer	Spoke with political official	Spoke with religious leader	Got together to fix problem	Gave financial help
<b>WAVE 1</b>						
Volunteered in last 12 months	1					
Served as an officer	.313***	1				
Spoke with political official	.329***	.208***	1			
Spoke with religious leader	.273***	.205***	.374***	1		
Got together to fix problem	.277***	.091***	.344***	.335***	1	
Gave financial help	.140***	.097***	.088**	.083***	.072***	1
<b>WAVE 2</b>						
Volunteered in last 12 months	1					
Served as an officer	.332***	1				
Spoke with political official	.215***	.235***	1			
Spoke with religious leader	.265***	.226***	.305***	1		
Got together to fix problem	.261***	.213***	.287***	.304***	1	
Gave financial help	.141***	.072***	.028***	.069***	.039***	1
<b>WAVE 3</b>						
Volunteered in last 12 months	1					
Served as an officer	.270***	1				
Spoke with political official	.224***	.210***	1			
Spoke with religious leader	.264***	.198***	.282***	1		
Got together to fix problem	.262***	.170***	.344***	.251***	1	
Gave financial help	.142***	.142***	.044***	.107***	.107***	1

Variable	Dependent Variable: Employment	
	Wave 1 Chi-2 (df)	Wave 2 Chi-2 (df)
Independent Variables		
Age and Gender		
Age (t-test)	-54.854 (26,004.708)*** (0.173)	-66.314 (26,937.704)*** (0.161)
Female	302.537 (1)***	423.252 (1)***
Race/Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	57.137 (1)***	65.981 (1)***
Other Race/Ethnicity	22.592 (1)***	17.398 (1)***
White/Caucasian	63.736 (1)***	0.032 (1)
Black/African American	0.084 (1)	36.856 (1)***
Native American/Alaska Native	39.886 (1)***	125.444 (1)***
Asian	6.682 (1)**	132.241 (1)***
Education		
High school graduation/GED or higher	2,466.836 (1)***	767.401 (1)***
Family structure		
Spouse in housing unit	2.710 (1)	5.657 (1)*
Children in household	895.153 (1)***	1,977.905 (1)***
Homeownership		



<b>Variable</b>	<b>Dependent Variable: Employment</b>		
	<b>Wave 1</b> <b>Chi-2 (df)</b>	<b>Wave 2</b> <b>Chi-2 (df)</b>	<b>Wave 3</b> <b>Chi-2 (df)</b>
Own house	208.137 (1)***	262.670 (1)***	192.842 (1)***
<i>Public Assistance</i>			
Received SNAP/Food Stamps	1,448.083 (1)***	603.398 (1)***	610.775 (1)***
Received TANF/Welfare	696.721 (1)***	152.057 (1)***	349.726 (1)***
<i>Civic Engagement</i>			
Volunteered in last 12 months	4.692 (1)*	31.937 (1)***	242.658 (1)***
Served as an officer	9.178 (1)**	16.598 (1)***	31.127 (1)***
Spoke with political official	46.767 (1)***	1.422 (1)	0.191 (1)
Spoke with religious leader	62.370 (1)***	47.637 (1)***	0.264 (1)
Got together to fix problem	0.086 (1)	0.000 (1)	4.462 (1)*
Gave financial help	557.837 (1)***	775.995 (1)***	342.590 (1)***
Overall civic engagement	187.169 (1)***	185.450 (1)***	250.381 (1)***

Note: Pearson Chi-Square value was calculated using a Chi-2 test, except the variable age, which was calculated using a t-test. Standard errors are shown in parenthesis for age.

\*p≤.05, \*\*p≤.01, \*\*\*p≤.001

## Appendix H

**Table A.7.** Bivariate Relationships Between Independent Variables and Income by Wave (Weighted)

Variable	Dependent Variable: Income	
	Wave 2 Income T-test (df)	Wave 3 Income T-test (df)
<b>Independent Variables</b>		
<i>Age and Gender</i>		
Age*	-0.202***	-0.217***
Female	7.618 (11,303.359)*** (146.576)	0.490 (7,044.709) (310.073)
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
Hispanic/Latino	-12.302 (24,879.104)*** (125.825)	-5.050 (19,064.329)*** (220.691)
Other Race/Ethnicity	-3.521 (33,421)*** (121.119)	1.969 (28,247.830)* (200.979)
White/Caucasian	5.059 (23,917.933)*** (124.697)	2.525 (31,335)* (200.688)
Black/African American	-6.146 (7,929.551)*** (168.185)	-15.104 (7,505.368)*** (242.678)
Native American/Alaska Native	-6.893 (642.392)*** (402.775)	-9.545 (677.673)*** (490.768)
Asian	13.560 (665.197)*** 596.315	7.635 (677.172)*** (716.611)
<i>Education</i>		
High school graduation/GED or higher	41.380 (33,594.349)*** (114.955)	42.776 (30,672.950)*** (190.165)
<i>Family structure</i>		
Spouse in housing unit	80.854 (26,068.123)*** (113.259)	77.065 (21,114.881)*** (190.976)
Children in household	64.571 (25,924.229)*** (105.180)	33.006 (13,607.509)*** (225.793)
<i>Homeownership</i>		
Own house	13.002 (15,630.883)*** (139.819)	5.799 (20,181.262)*** (205.574)

Variable	Dependent Variable: Income	
	Wave 2 Income T-test (df)	Wave 3 Income T-test (df)
<i>Public Assistance</i>		
Received SNAP/Food Stamps	-63.027 (33,830.476)*** (112.119)	-69.527 (30,103.620)*** (177.878)
Received TANF/Welfare	-54.331 (34,641.755)*** (112.296)	-47.245 (31,546.775)*** (184.065)
<i>Civic Engagement</i>		
Volunteered in last 12 months	13.871 (15,044.789)*** (139.305)	11.694 (12,536.865)*** (253.846)
Served as an officer	7.935 (4,920.219)*** (199.171)	19.314 (4,578.842)*** (327.306)
Spoke with political official	7.315 (6,519.231)*** (180.641)	9.280 (4,267.050)*** (399.005)
Spoke with religious leader	6.844 (4,855.173)*** (196.305)	9.218 (3,549.926)*** (433.314)
Got together to fix problem	-0.060 (34,729) (138.341)	6.281 (7,867.868)*** (291.348)
Gave financial help	31.231 (22,082.051)*** (126.218)	34.742 (17,124.642)*** (218.777)
Overall civic engagement	14.094 (28,232)*** (121.574)	23.588 (30,975.141)*** (192.335)

Note: Correlation tests were conducted for age. Standard error differences are shown in parenthesis.

\*p≤.05, \*\*p≤.01, \*\*\*p≤.001

## **Appendix I**

### **Disclaimers**

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