Social Capital as a Public Policy Tool
Project Report

September 2005

PRI Project
**Social Capital as a
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Canada

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The PRI contributes to the Government of Canada's medium-term policy planning by conducting cross-cutting research projects, and by harnessing knowledge and expertise from within the federal government and from universities and research organizations. However, conclusions and proposals contained in PRI reports do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada or participating departments and agencies.

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INTRODUCTION

Family, friends, and acquaintances frequently constitute an important asset essential to the well-being of Canadians. When one is seeking support to make it through hard times, searching for a new job opportunity, or simply living a full and active life, it pays to know people. This is the simple idea behind the concept of social capital.

A wide range of research illustrates the ways in which the availability and use of various social ties may make a difference to individual well-being. The series of social capital thematic policy studies (PRI, 2005b) commissioned by the Policy Research Initiative (PRI) and partner federal departments reviews this evidence in several key policy areas. Whether it is a question of early childhood development, educational attainment, avoidance of delinquency, labour market entry, or aging well in your retirement, knowing people to turn to for resources and support may make a difference for both getting by and getting ahead.

Moreover, what is true for individuals is also true for groups and associations: those with the right mix of social connections may be able to negotiate more effectively the various challenges they face, from economic growth and community development to crime prevention and engaging an active citizenry. People and groups with extensive social connections linking them to people with diverse resources tend to be more hired, housed, healthy, and happy.

To make this concept practicable for public policy purposes, research and analysis on social capital must be able to answer clearly some basic questions. How do people have access to, and realize benefits from social capital? How can it complement or enhance the value of other resources, such as human and financial capital? Should governments play a role in the creation of social capital? How can we design more effective policies and programs by taking this concept into consideration?

Early in 2003, the Government of Canada's Policy Research Initiative launched an interdepartmental project to investigate the relevance and usefulness of social capital as a public policy tool. This report presents a synthesis of the main conclusions and

key insights learned during the course of this project. It also proposes some possible approaches for the use and integration of social capital in the Canadian policy (and research) agenda.

After two years of consultation and research, we have concluded that there is a benefit to be gained for public policy by incorporating a social capital component into relevant government programs and initiatives. This does not mean, however, that governments should pursue a grand strategy to develop Canadian social capital simply to have more social capital. Governments should instead consider social capital as a means or instrument that, in complement with other resources, can facilitate the achievement of specific policy and program objectives, and target any social capital-related interventions accordingly.

More specifically, five key insights emerged from the PRI work.

1. *The networks of social ties that a person or group can call upon for resources and support constitute their social capital. This social capital may be an important, underestimated ingredient in the well-being and participation of individuals and groups in the social, political, and economic life of their community.*

    Ensuring that individuals have the opportunity to participate fully in society is a central preoccupation of social policy. Government policies in industrialized countries have emphasized the acquisition of human capital and integration into the labour market as a means for creating just such an opportunity. More recently, public policy planners have also turned to thinking about financial and physical assets in the form of savings and housing as other important resources to promote social inclusion and participation. Developing these resources helps to build people's capabilities in advance of a period of difficulty or crisis, rather than only offering remedial action afterward. This reflects a social investment approach to social policy, whereby, through recognizing the value of human capital and other assets, including social capital, the state can help equip its citizens with the capabilities to participate fully in the social and economic life of the country.

2. *A focus on social capital allows for a closer examination of the capacity of individuals and groups to forge linkages among themselves and with organizations at the local level.*

   Understanding these relational dynamics is particularly important in a context where governments increasingly search for ways to support local communities and citizen participation through partnerships and the mobilization of local resources. It allows for an understanding of how links between various actors in the community can lead to a more co-ordinated approach to action and involvement, better access to untapped resources, and the creation of new community resources.

3. *A social capital perspective will be particularly fruitful in three areas of policy: helping populations at risk of social exclusion, supporting key life-course transitions, and promoting community development efforts.*

   These are all areas where the mobilization of resources through social relationships can have a significant impact. The integration of immigrants, the care for frail seniors, and neighbourhood crime prevention are all examples of public policy objectives that would benefit from an explicit consideration of people's social networks.

4. *Governments inevitably affect patterns of social capital development. Taking into consideration the role of social capital (and the interactions between social relationships and policies) in a more systematic way in program design, implementation, and evaluation can potentially make a significant difference in the achievement of policy objectives.*

   Adopting a social capital perspective emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the value, usefulness, and dynamics of social ties. Do they bring access to useful resources? Are they unduly stressed or in need of supplementary resources (as in the case of some care networks)? In instances where social capital may be a useful instrument in the achievement of particular policy objectives, there is a potential array of options by which it can be integrated into program design. In a few cases, this may be fairly direct in terms of enabling the creation and support of specific network relationships or tapping into existing networks to deliver services more effectively. More commonly, programs may find it useful to establish favourable conditions for the generation of relevant social capital, or at least to ensure that they do not arbitrarily disrupt sources of useful social capital already existing among populations or communities targeted by interventions.

5. *We need more concrete and context-specific empirical evidence on the best practices for integrating social capital into government policies and programs.*

   Furthering the empirical evidence on the interactions between social capital and government policies and programs can be achieved by integrating explicit measures of social capital into relevant departmental research and data development plans, evaluation frameworks, and demonstration projects (in policy areas most likely to benefit from a social capital perspective). Using a network-based approach to social capital allows policy researchers to take advantage of a number of practical and proven measurement tools that can be applied to a variety of research instruments – from thematic longitudinal surveys to exploratory case studies – for capturing and tracking the presence and manifestations of social capital in diverse life circumstances and local contexts.

The remainder of this report is divided into four sections. The first briefly reviews the mandate, approach, and activities of the PRI social capital project. This work centred around three main areas: conceptual development, policy applications, and measurement. The three subsequent sections examine each of these areas in turn, synthesizing the main findings of the project's work.

1. THE PRI PROJECT: SOCIAL CAPITAL AS A PUBLIC POLICY TOOL

Project Background

What is the value of social capital for public policy? In 2003, the PRI social capital project was established to explore this question. The project was inspired by a growing interest within academic and policy circles sparked by research linking social capital to a broad range of issues central to public agendas. Indeed, many observers were pointing to a myriad of ways in which existing government efforts were implicitly connected to social capital.

Scholarly work on social capital in various disciplines increased dramatically over the past decade. Robert Putnam was already the most cited social scientist of the 1990s, and with 2000's *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, he truly launched the idea of social capital into a wider public consciousness.

In Canada, interest crystallized with an international symposium held in Québec City in 2000. Co-organized by the OECD and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), the symposium brought together leading thinkers and government officials to consider how human and social capital interact to influence sustained economic growth and well-being. In

December 2001, the closing plenary of the PRI's National Policy Research Conference, *Bringing Communities Together*, centred on two riveting presentations by Robert Putnam and John Helliwell on the implications of social capital for public policy; more than 30 deputy ministers and heads of agencies were in attendance.

Along with this widespread interest, however, came some considerable grounds for scepticism that the concept could be usefully operationalized for public policy purposes. Efforts to harness the concept for policy and program development had been severely limited by conceptual ambiguities and measurement difficulties. Some researchers worried that the concept had increasingly taken on a "circus tent" quality in which social capital had come to stand for everything positive and civic (Briggs, 2004: 151). Because of the seeming versatility of the concept – sometimes referring to social networks, but other times also including such things as trust, church attendance, community cohesion, or institutional efficacy – critics feared that social capital ran the risk of being rendered meaningless by becoming everything to everyone.

Figure 1: Academic Articles on Social Capital, 1984-2003
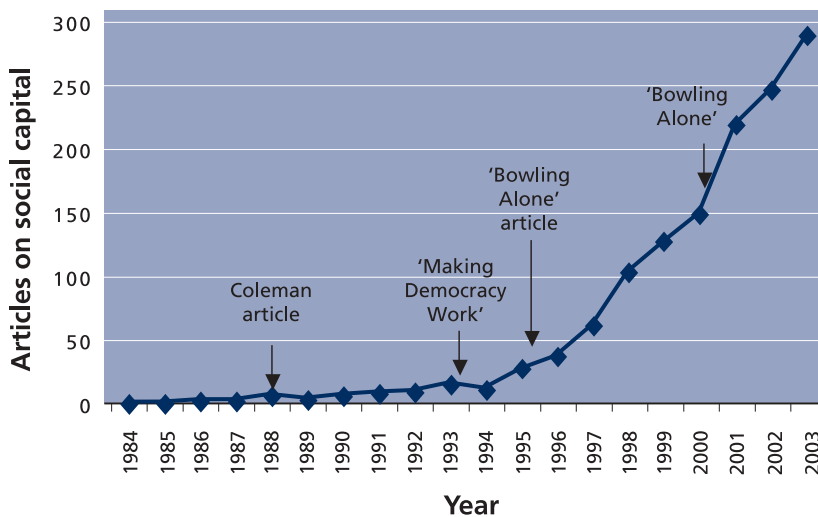
Source: Halpern (2003).

Figure 2: Project Based on Three Streams
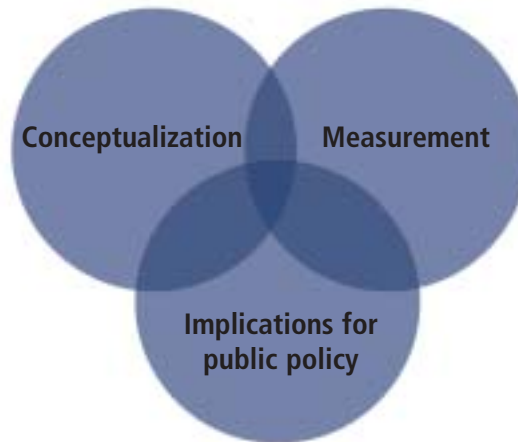
If social capital were to be a useful tool in the way that the concept of human capital has become, it clearly needed to be operationalized in a manner that could allow public authorities to concretely identify what it was, open it up to effective measurement, and thereby explore its productive potential in achieving broader public policy goals.

Objectives

The PRI social capital project was therefore launched at a meeting of assistant deputy ministers in January 2003 to assess the potential role and contribution of social capital in the achievement of federal policy objectives, with the hope that a clearer awareness and understanding of the phenomenon could help to better tune public policies and programs and broaden future policy options. Three objectives were set.

- Develop an operational definition and rigorous framework for the analysis and measurement of social capital.

- Identify key policy and program areas where social capital may play an important role in attaining policy objectives.

- Incorporate the project findings into a strategic set of recommendations for testing new approaches, improved measurement, and policy action.

Methodology

To accomplish these objectives, the work of the project was divided into three interrelated streams: conceptualization, measurement, and implications for public policy.

Results obtained in each stream were developed though a series of research and consultation activities undertaken by the PRI Social Capital Project team, in close collaboration with departmental partners and academic researchers. These activities included:

- comprehensive reviews of existing social capital literature and international work in the area;

- consultations, workshops, and conferences to gather structured input, feedback, and advice on proposed options and approaches;

- small group discussions on existing practices in the area; and

- commissioned technical and issue papers from academic experts.

The first part of the project focused on the development of an operational definition and conceptual framework for the analysis and measurement of social capital. This was based on input received from federal policy and research managers from more than 15 departments and agencies, and from a group of leading Canadian and international experts in the

area. In parallel, the PRI also worked with Statistics Canada and academic experts to examine different empirical strategies and tools for the measurement of social capital at the individual and collective levels.

The second part of the project explored key policy and program areas, particularly in social policy, where the application of social capital may play an important role. This began with an international conference with the OECD and several federal partners, in November 2003, on the role of social capital in immigrant integration and the management of diversity. After this conference, eight interdepartmental working groups were established to oversee the development of a series of thematic policy studies on the best available evidence in areas of strategic importance to the Government of Canada. The studies link social capital to a wide range of issue areas including:

• poverty reduction;

• community development;

• youth civic engagement;

• community crime prevention;

• healthy aging;

• the settlement of new immigrants to Canada;

• educational attainment in Aboriginal communities; and

• Aboriginal community policing.

Project publications and activities resulting from these first two phases are listed in Appendix 1 and 2.

This report is part of the third and final phase of the project, aimed at incorporating what we have learned into a set of conclusions and recommendations for the strategic use of social capital within the federal government. Key outcomes of this third phase also include a reference guide for the measurement of social capital (PRI, 2005a), as well as a volume of thematic policy studies entitled *Social Capital in Action* (PRI, 2005b).

The following sections present a synthesis of the overall conclusions of the Social Capital as a Public Policy Tool Project based on the findings from the three project streams: conceptualization, measurement, and implications for public policy.

2. THE CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

What Do We Mean by Social Capital?

A clear understanding of what is meant by social capital is the *sine qua non* for rendering the concept useful to public policy practitioners. While there are many legitimate differences in opinion as to how best to conceptualize social capital, the PRI has retained and proposed a definition of social capital based on social networks as its central component.

> *Social capital refers to the networks of social relations that may provide individuals and groups with access to resources and supports.*

Adopting a network-based approach to social capital makes sense for at least three reasons. It allows us to: operationalize social capital in a strategic way for public policy; distinguish social capital from other closely related concepts; and promote consistency in research and measurement.

Operationalizing Social Capital in a Strategic Way for Public Policy

Using a network-based approach enables us to look at social capital as a resource or instrument to achieve potential individual or group benefits. It makes it possible to investigate the influence of social capital over a range of questions of public interest and to understand the effects that government policies and programs can have on the creation or mobilization of social capital by individuals and communities. We have illustrated our recommended framework in Figure 3.[1]

Researchers can investigate the ways in which individuals or groups invest in and draw on their social

Figure 3: A Framework for the Analysis of Social Capital

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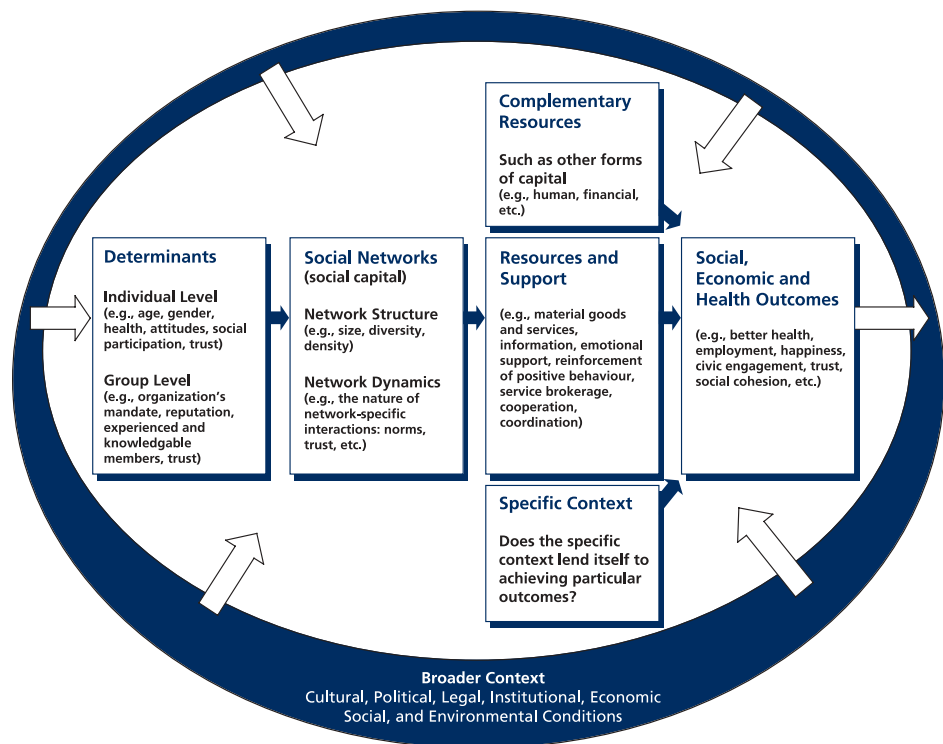
1 A detailed description and discussion of the framework is provided in PRI (2003).

Interpreting the Framework

This framework allows one to map what social capital an individual or group may be able to access, and how the resources and support obtained from their social capital, in complement with other resources and a favourable specific context, may be instrumental in producing specific social, economic, and health outcomes. Consider how both an individual and a group's social capital can be situated within the framework. (The following examples are fictional, but illustrative of the experiences of many Canadians and Canadian organizations.)

At the individual level … Two neighbours, Martin and Louis, were both factory workers, but were forced to take early retirement. Martin and Louis had never participated in many community activities, and most of their previous social life had revolved around work-related activities. These activities, however, largely ended with their retirement. After retirement, both men began to experience some health problems associated with poor diet and a lack of exercise leading to minor heart attacks. Martin was divorced, and his adult children lived in another city. He did not feel comfortable joining in community activities, as he had not previously participated in such activities and did not feel he was very good with small talk. As a consequence, Martin was socially isolated; he did not have close friends or family he could turn to for health advice, or who would encourage him to improve his diet and exercise. Martin's health

continued to deteriorate. Louis, in contrast, is still married and his children and grandchildren live nearby. After early retirement, Louis' wife encouraged him to attend a community support group. This led to participation in other community activities. His wife and children have made sure he has seen his doctor, and have pushed him to improve his diet and exercise. His involvement in community activities has extended his social network and encouraged a greater sense of empowerment in Louis. After the initial health scare from the heart attack, Louis is now in much better shape.

At the group level … the Hillcrest Heights Neighbourhood Association wanted to develop a program to assist youth dealing with anger and aggression issues. Because the Community Association was well-established with an active membership and clear leadership structure, it was quickly able to gain support for the idea and raise some funds from the neighbourhood. The Association was able to partner with a community services centre that had the expertise, though not the funds, to establish a neighbourhood martial arts program that had proven successful in other jurisdictions. The combined resources and expertise of this partnership, together with additional funding received from a government grant, enabled a successful, small-scale martial arts program to assist neighbourhood youth with anger management.

networks. Even with this relatively lean approach to social capital, various dimensions can be drawn into the analysis. Depending on the particular research and policy application, social capital studies can encompass:

- how individuals and groups develop or access social networks (constraints and enabling conditions);

- the various characteristics of the networks (e.g., diversity of members) and network dynamics (how they are actually used or mobilized to access and create resources);

- the norms and institutional arrangements that form the context in which such networks operate;

- the resources that can be potentially accessed or created through participation in the networks; and

- the benefits of social relationships in the form of economic, social, and health outcomes.

This model distinguishes social capital from its determinants and its outcomes. An inability to make just such a distinction has, at times, been the source of much confusion in the literature and in policy discussions about social capital. A network-based approach, however, draws a line between what social capital is and what it does.

The model also captures the dynamic and context-specific nature of social capital. People may need to draw different resources from different types of networks at different times, depending on their life circumstances. Moreover, a network that is instrumental during a certain life transition or event (e.g., when a family member becomes sick, when a youth changes cities to attend post-secondary education, or when an individual takes on a short-term career assignment) can be quite episodic and context specific, and may not continue to be active after a certain period. The potential impact of social capital on various outcomes will vary depending on individual characteristics and experiences and on the ways in which its effects are enhanced or diminished by the wider social, political, economic, and cultural environment. Static and non-context specific measures of social capital may therefore be of more limited utility for policy purposes.

Distinguishing Social Capital from Other Closely Related Concepts

Civic engagement and social cohesion, to cite but two examples, are social phenomena that have been, at times, lumped under a social capital banner. Our approach suggests that it is possible to make a distinction between these phenomena and social capital. They can be a determinant of social capital, an outcome of social capital, or both. The specific relationship between them is one for empirical investigation.

Civic engagement – participation in the social and political life of a community – can potentially create social capital. If people actively participate in civic life, those people may have more opportunities to expand their social networks. But this is not always the case. For example, voting in an election is a form of civic engagement, but it may not foster or strengthen new or existing social ties. Conversely, civic engagement may be a result of social capital. Those with more social ties may be encouraged to play an active role in social or political community

activities. Yet, at times, individuals with extensive social capital (or networks of social ties) may nevertheless choose to remain relatively uninvolved in community activities.

Similarly, social cohesion, or the capacity of community members to live in harmony, is also related to social capital. The social cohesion in a given community may be a consequence of rich social capital bonding the community together. Regular contact and interaction among community members may support a sense of unity. However, a community with an abundance of social capital does not necessarily mean there will be community cohesion. If community members are tied together in highly polarized social networks, high levels of social capital may, in fact, perpetuate social division and mistrust. (One may think of the high levels of social capital in certain areas of Northern Ireland in recent decades, for example.) Again, the relationship between the two phenomena is one for empirical investigation, and cannot be assumed a priori.

Trust is another closely related concept that must be distinguished from social capital. Trust is clearly an important phenomenon in its own right. Governments may have a strong interest in measuring levels of trust as part of an assessment, for example, of the degree of support for, and effectiveness of, particular government programs or services. Most healthy social relationships involve a degree of trust, and measures of trust are sometimes used as indicators of social capital. Yet the two are not necessarily connected. An individual may have a high level of generalized trust or trust in institutions, yet engage in a bare minimum of social interactions. Trust is a complex phenomenon that may have a very different dynamic from social networks. Lumping them together under a single banner labelled social capital may do a disservice in failing to identify adequately and isolate their independent characteristics and effects. This said, public policy investigations of network-based social capital may still wish to pay close attention to measuring trust. For example, trust can be an important determinant of social capital. Matthews and Côté (2005) argued that while police officers in Aboriginal communities must build appropriate social ties to members of the community if they are to be effective, a generalized community distrust of police based on historical experiences in some communities may

present a difficult barrier to forming social ties. Trust can also be a key factor in shaping how members of a social network interact. For example, a social worker assisting an at-risk youth may be quite concerned about the levels of trust between the youth and the youth's parents that may be contributing to an unhealthy relationship. Trust can also be an outcome or product of social capital. In communities previously divided by conflict or historical experiences of exploitation, having members of different factions come together in specific projects may help create a generalized sense of trust and reconciliation. In short, both trust and social capital are important phenomena, but the exact relationship between the two remains a question for empirical testing.

Promoting Consistency in Research and Measurement

Finally, a conceptual focus on networks also provides a means of ensuring consistent measurement across a variety of policy applications. Knowing this is crucial to better identify policy levers. The above framework, which sets the stage for our measurement exercise, has direct consequences on how research and measurement of social capital, and its interactions, can be approached in a policy-relevant manner. The utility of this approach for research and measurement is elaborated in Section 4 of this report.

Potential Benefits from Social Capital

Social networks (formal and informal) can bring many advantages. Indeed, the value of social capital depends on the value of the flow of benefits that can be drawn from an activation of these networks. The same is true of human capital; the value of any given education or training depends on the flow of benefits it produces. There is a range of potential benefits or resources that may flow from a person or group's network of social ties. These include the following.

- **Material goods and services:** Social networks often constitute an essential source of informal services such as child care, informal health care, language training or, in distressed situations, food, clothing, and housing.

Why Call It "Social Capital"?

Having access to, and the ability to make use of, the right kind of social network is often necessary to achieve valued outcomes. For individuals and organizations, who one knows can matter for "getting by" or "getting ahead." The central idea is that our networks of social contacts may represent another form of capital resource, beyond physical and human capital, with important potential returns on investment.

Although researchers have long been interested in the nature and importance of social relationships, thinking of these social ties as a form of capital asset provides a new lens for examining how these ties can be invested in and drawn on in ways that complement other capital assets available to individuals and groups.

Viewing social networks as social capital thus allows us to consider them in instrumental terms. This said, most people clearly do not think of the social ties they form as instrumental investments in the way they may do with their savings and education (although of course there are some exceptions, as in certain professions based on networking). But whether or not social relationships are invested in consciously and instrumentally, public policy researchers may benefit from understanding how and why people do or do not invest their time and energy in social ties, how these are used in different circumstances, and whether this allows them to realize benefits from their social ties once mobilized.

- **Information:** Job hunters can draw on their contacts to get a scoop on new employment opportunities. Collaboration between community groups can help provide coordinated information for newly arrived immigrants.

- **Reduced transaction costs:** Organizations or groups may spend less time finding the right employee or new business contacts if social ties can act as intermediaries.

- **Emotional support:** In stressful situations, support networks may help to find a solution to the problem, reduce the perceived importance of the problem, or provide a distraction from the problem. Indeed, simply knowing you have a potential support network may increase your sense of self-efficacy and control.

- **Reinforcement of positive behaviours:** Friends or family may influence whether individuals exercise, eat healthy diets, or quit smoking.

- **Service Brokerage:** Network contacts may help broker effective access to health, employment, or training services for those who would be unable or unwilling to access these services by themselves.

Individuals may also benefit from a community's social capital, even if they have low levels of personal social capital. For example, evidence from a study of the 1995 Chicago heat wave found that the social connections and linkages that existed in a neighbourhood made a difference. More than 700 people died as a result of that heat wave, with the highest risk of death being concentrated among isolated elderly persons. However, those neighbourhoods with networks of neighbours who regularly saw each other and interacted on a daily basis were better able to protect their residents against the risk of death, even those elderly persons who were typically isolated from their neighbours. Thus benefits from social capital need not be private, but can also take on public dimensions (Cannuscio et al., 2003).

Social Capital Is Not a Panacea

Social capital is not a miracle cure that will solve all public policy problems. For example, at the PRI social policy conference in December 2004, social capital researchers, Jerry White from the University of Western Ontario and John Field from Scotland's Stirling University, both pointed out that in terms of educational attainment social capital can only explain a moderate amount of variance in outcomes, with several other factors being much more important. Indeed, while much research focuses on the contribution of social capital as a unique variable, social networks do not function in a vacuum. Rather, they may simply work to complement other resources that have relevance for a particular challenge or issue.

Moreover, social capital may be an influential factor only at certain threshold points. For those with virtually no social capital, even a modest increase may make a large difference in outcomes. But more social capital does not always mean better outcomes. As White and Field argued, while one's social ties may, through reinforcement and sanctions, promote successful educational attainment, they can have quite the opposite effect in tightly knit families or communities where parents and other members have low educational attainment and aspirations. This is not to argue that social capital is unimportant, but rather to acknowledge that it must be considered in relation to a number of other resources and factors that may make a difference to achieving particular goals and objectives.

Different Forms of Social Capital

Having substantial social capital per se is not always a significant benefit for all purposes. Researchers with whom we have consulted have pointed, for example, to some communities (e.g., certain ethnic enclaves, Aboriginal communities, or isolated settlements) where their members have extensive ties within the community but perhaps lack ties outside of the community that could be leveraged to their advantage. Identifying different types of social relations that may be useful for different purposes is a helpful step in making the concept policy relevant. Many different typologies have been developed to highlight important network differences. The distinction made by Keating et al. (2005) between support networks and care networks has important implications for programs dedicated to aging well. The most commonly applied typology in recent years, however, has distinguished three specific forms of social capital: bonding, bridging, and linking.

Robert Putnam emphasized the distinction between bonding and bridging. Homogenous social networks with stronger, closer ties bond their members together. Families are typically key sources of bonding social capital and are a pivotal source of social support for their members precisely because of their strength. In contrast, networks with diverse, heterogeneous ties that bridge social differences may often have much weaker ties. Although bridging ties are frequently weaker, they may nevertheless be a key source of social leverage, because they can provide access to resources (such as information about job prospects) that are quite different from one's own resources.

As with other capital resources, bridging social capital is not equally distributed (Erickson, 2003). Network diversity is typically greater for:

- the better educated;
- those in paid employment;
- those in higher status occupations;
- those who are active in voluntary associations;
- those with a spouse or a partner;
- those with children;
- those in mid-life;
- men; and
- native-born individuals.

Social Capital Can Also Be Associated with Negative Outcomes

The power dynamics of social ties, particularly from close bonding ties, can result in a myriad of less desirable consequences.

- Social networks can privilege their members at the expense of outsiders. Old-boy networks or networks of "not in my backyard" neighbours are typical examples.

- Individuals or organizations may draw on their social capital for criminal purposes, as in the Mafia or terrorist networks.

- Social ties can also drain one's resources. Strong norms of mutual assistance can mean that individuals may be continually called to aid free-riding family or community members even at the expense of their own potential well-being.

- Communities with strong social capital may demand conformity and restrict individual freedom.

- Similarly, social networks may enforce downward-levelling norms, as in some tightly knit families with low aspirations for their children's education.

The negative aspects of social capital do not diminish its potential usefulness as a public policy concept. Indeed, those concerned with crime prevention or juvenile delinquency may be particularly interested in focusing on these negative aspects.

The strong in-group loyalty of bonding social capital can be prone to a number of negative outcomes, including the potential exclusion of outsiders or a stifling of the freedoms of network members. This has led some to prescribe "less bonding, more bridging." Frequently, however, people are in need of more and not less bonding. Children need strong ties to their parents for successful physical and psychological development, and seniors needing care may come to depend particularly on strong bonding ties to close family members. Moreover, bridging and bonding may be important complementary rather than competing categories of social capital. At the PRI-OECD conference on social capital and immigrant integration in November 2003 we heard of several instances where communities needed both strong intra-community bonding and extensive bridging ties to participate successfully in the full socio-economic life of their host societies.

A third and somewhat distinct category of social capital refers to linking ties. Linking social capital describes connections with people in positions of power. Such ties can potentially provide access for individuals and groups to resources from formal institutions. Michael Woolcock of the World Bank has pioneered this concept, arguing, in particular, that we should think through the social relationships linking public service providers and service recipients. Teachers, doctors, social workers, lower court officials, legal services officers, and front-line case workers are all government officials with wide discretion over the dispensation of public benefits and sanctions. These are the officials that link the state to the local citizens, and the quality of their face-to-face relationships may make a considerable difference to the relative success or failure of public services. As parents we are typically more concerned with the quality of the relationship between the teacher and our child than the provincially set

curriculum. Similarly, the quality of our relationship with our doctor is one of our primary concerns with regard to the state of the health care system. Attention to the quality of these relationships as a potential resource may be helpful for policy purposes.

In sum, not all networks of social ties share the same characteristics or provide access to the same range of support and resources. Particular manifestations of social capital may be highly useful in achieving certain outcomes, while of limited value or even counter-productive in achieving others. The bonding, bridging, and linking distinctions may help point public policy researchers to different forms of social capital that are more or less relevant to the particular issue with which they are dealing. Other typologies to capture policy-relevant network differences may also need to be developed and used depending on the issue in question.

KEY MESSAGES ON CONCEPTUALIZATION

1. Social capital refers to the networks of social relations that may provide individuals, groups, or organizations with access to resources and supports.

2. A focus on social networks allows analysts to consider social capital as a means to achieve broader policy objectives, rather than an end in itself; it makes it possible to separate conceptually and analytically "what" social capital is from "what it does."

3. The value of different forms of social capital is context dependent. Maximizing social capital per se may not always be beneficial.

4. Social capital does not function in a vacuum; it is affected by, complements, or reinforces the role of other resources that have relevance for a particular challenge or issue.

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Is There a Role for Government?

Does government have any business influencing people's choices about investing in their social capital? A liberal democracy is supposed to guarantee the liberties of individuals. One might suggest that the social relationships we choose to pursue lie at the very heart of our most basic freedoms, and there is no room for the state in making those choices.

Yet governments already and inevitably influence the development of social capital in myriad ways.[2] This is done at two levels.

- Some policies have a broad but indirect effect on how social relations are formed. Decisions about public transport and housing, parental leave and education, day care and recreation facilities, to name but a few, significantly shape the social connections people make.
- Some policies already implicitly integrate or promote social-capital building activities. Many programs and initiatives at the federal, provincial, or local level incorporate elements of social capital in their efforts to build individual or community capacity (e.g., mentoring, building organized support networks, brokering community partnerships). This is done, for example, through activities that increase, influence, or mobilize:
  - networks of social support;
  - intra-community bonds or networks;
  - inter-community networks; or
  - linkages to various institutions.

If social capital is an important resource for individuals and groups, and if governments already inevitably affect the creation and development of social capital, would there be a public benefit from a more explicit and deliberate focus on social capital within government policies and programs?

The overall conclusion from experts consulted was "yes", but with a healthy dose of caution. There were repeated warnings that public policy makers should be very careful in choosing to target explicitly social capital investment for policy purposes. Some representatives from community organizations, for example, have expressed a degree of wariness toward government efforts to tap local social resources lest they become substitutes for tangible government assistance. Perri 6 (1997) has cautioned that there have been few robust evaluations of the efficacy of those interventions deliberately designed to shape social capital formation (mentoring programs, special drop-in centres, friendship skills training, etc.). Moreover, he noted that promoting one type of social capital (such as bridging ties between disparate communities) to achieve one set of policy objectives may have the unintended consequence of undermining other patterns of social capital (such as strong bonding ties within communities) that are required for other policy goals.

Nevertheless, given that governments are already inevitably involved in affecting patterns of social capital, there are at least two key reasons for giving social capital more attention and deliberate focus within policy and program development, delivery, and evaluation.

First, the achievement of policy and program goals may be undermined without attention to the impact of those policies and programs on patterns of social capital formation and use. For example, traditional institutional models of nursing home care were developed to ensure the well-being of seniors. At times, however, such institutions have been designed with minimized areas for residents to congregate with other residents or external visitors, leaving the elderly residents isolated both socially and physically from their families and communities. The effects of this social isolation may include an increased sense of alienation and decreased feelings of control and self-esteem (Cannuscio et al., 2003). In short, without a consideration for the value of maintaining and supporting their residents' social capital, some institutions may inadvertently undermine the well-being of the seniors to which they are dedicated.

The first rationale then for an explicit incorporation of social capital into policies and programs is to avoid inadvertent harm to useful existing sources of

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2   See this discussion in Perri 6 (2004) and Nash (2004).

social capital. A second, more affirmative potential rationale exists. Supporting the investment of individuals and groups in the development of their social capital may increase the capacity of these individuals to meet specific challenges. Such an approach is consistent with recent social policy trends toward the emergence of what Anthony Giddens calls the social investment state.

The social investment state is one that seeks to target social expenditures, as in investing in the human capital of its citizens, to ensure that people are equipped with the skills and resources to negotiate life's challenges. Encouraging or supporting potentially useful investments in social capital as a complementary strategy to help build self-sufficiency would be consistent with this thinking.

Although Giddens' work on the social investment state stresses the development of human capital as a key resource for individuals. He also provides some indications of how the consideration of social capital might be usefully integrated into this new social policy approach.

> Conventional poverty programmes need to be replaced with community-focused approaches, which permit more democratic participation as well as being more effective. Community building emphasizes support networks, self-help and the cultivation of social capital as means to generate economic renewal in low-income neighbourhoods. Fighting poverty requires an injection of economic resources, but applied to support local initiative. Leaving people mired in benefits tends to exclude them from the larger society. Reducing benefits to force individuals into work pushes them into already crowded low-wage labour markets. Community building initiatives concentrate upon the multiple problems individuals and communities face, including job quality, health and childcare, education and transport (Giddens, 1998: 110-111).

In this example, social capital is an instrument for achieving a specific social policy objective (in this case the alleviation of poverty). This is consistent with the key conclusion of the PRI social capital project. Social capital's greatest potential for public policy is as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself.

We should not be thinking, therefore, about a national strategy to build social capital or any sort of blanket policy statement aimed at increasing the social capital of Canadians for its own sake. Instead, the greatest potential role of social capital lies in its capacity to act as a resource employed for the achievement of broader policy objectives, such as immigrant integration, economic participation, or improved education and health outcomes. For this reason, the project recommends adopting more explicit considerations of social capital within policy and program development, delivery, and evaluation.

Incorporating Social Capital

A consideration of the important productive, and sometimes destructive, effects of various social relationships may become highly useful for public policy purposes. At a minimum, adopting a social capital lens could provide insights into the importance of social capital (or lack thereof) for the well-being of individuals and groups. More broadly, social capital may represent a useful tool for complementing other policy approaches and instruments (such as investment in the creation of human and financial capital) that cannot address by themselves the complexities of the modern world.

This does not, of course, preclude very difficult decisions and trade-offs. There is the risk, for example, that policies designed to shape social capital may inevitably benefit some to the exclusion of others. Adding social capital to the equation, however, may at least allow public officials to have a broader picture of potential winners and losers than, for example, a simple economic analysis might suggest. This said, being able to capture fully the influence of social capital and take account of its effects on program outcomes remains a very challenging exercise (Nash, 2004: 229).

Possible approaches for integrating social capital into policy and program development are discussed below. But first, the next section examines specific policy areas where the application of a social capital perspective is particularly appropriate.

Key Areas for Applying a Social Capital Perspective

There are at least three broad areas of social policy where a focus on social capital is especially relevant and appropriate. These include policies and programs:

- helping populations at risk of social exclusion;
- supporting key life-course transitions; and
- promoting community development efforts.

Each area touches on federal policy priorities, cutting across departmental mandates. These areas share similar challenges in terms of how best to mobilize and build individual and collective resources and capacities. Moreover, in each case the underlying social relationships are of particularly central concern. The integration of immigrants, the reduction of child poverty, and healthy aging, for example, are obvious goals where public policy would benefit from an explicit consideration of people's social networks.

Policies Addressing the Needs of Those at Risk of Exclusion

Almost by definition, individuals and groups who experience social exclusion are cut off from those social ties that would allow them to participate more fully in the social, economic, and political life of their communities. The availability of certain kinds of social networks (or lack thereof) can have a significant impact on policies aimed at addressing the social and economic integration of individuals at risk of social exclusion, including new immigrants, the long-term unemployed, lone mothers, youth at risk, and certain Aboriginal communities. Some who experience this exclusion may be completely socially isolated, lacking any social capital resources on which to draw. For others, the picture is somewhat more complex. They may have plenty of social capital, at least of a particular kind. Indeed, social networks often constitute an essential resource for "getting by" for the socially excluded, especially for those who have low levels of other forms of capital. Such individuals may have a bonding network they can rely on for social support, but, in the absence of bridging ties, they can lack the capacity to leverage their networks to overcome obstacles and access new opportunities.

Social Capital and Immigrant Integration

"Bonding networks help newcomers get by as they acclimatize to their new environment. In the long run, how these individuals get ahead in Canadian society depends on the diversity of their networks. … Strong bonding networks could hinder upward mobility in the mainstream society, especially if the individual belongs to an ethnic minority group. Immigrants who maintain close ties with their own ethnic groups tend to have lower earnings than others (Reitz and Sklar, 1997). A study by Sanders et al. (2002) of Asian immigrants in the United States showed that co-ethnic networks are useful mostly in finding low-paying jobs whereas social ties outside one's ethnic network facilitate entry to jobs in mainstream society. Hence, who you know matters. In general, the longer one stays in the country, the more heterogeneous the network. Inter-ethnic networks, or bridging social capital, are important in immigrants' job searches especially within ethnic groups that, on average, do not have high socio-economic status. A study of five ethnic groups in Toronto by Ooka and Wellman (2003) showed that those who obtained jobs through inter-ethnic contacts had higher income than those who used intra-ethnic contacts, especially women."

Source: Kunz (2005).

For families experiencing recurring spells of poverty and welfare dependency, having the support of neighbours or peer groups who are also out of work or experiencing similar difficulties may provide some short-term relief, but can also end up draining already fragile resources within these immediate networks and possibly contribute to isolating families even more.

A social capital perspective in this instance allows one to focus on the multiple dimensions of poverty and exclusion. Inadequate income cannot entirely explain situations of poverty, particularly of persistent poverty. The level of education and training as well as shortages in affordable housing may also be important factors. Social isolation (or at least a lack of diversity of social ties) is yet another determinant, as the right social ties could be useful in escaping situations of poverty. For those in difficult circumstances, having only social ties to others in the same circumstance may not be useful to finding a way out. In contrast, those with ties, even very weak ties, to people in quite different situations may provide an awareness of opportunities for getting ahead.

A social capital perspective also points to the negative influences of social ties on the behaviour of individuals and groups at risk (e.g., dropping out of school, delinquency, family violence, unhealthy living, etc.). Awareness of these dynamics opens up a range of action to counteract or minimize these negative network effects, as through preventive services, positive peer mentoring, or respite care, for example.

The federal government has a number of social policy initiatives designed to reinforce the capacity of at-risk individuals and groups to overcome the obstacles blocking their full participation in society. Of course, the particular challenges faced by different at-risk people vary considerably. Public policy planners are therefore challenged to find responses to these quite divergent circumstances. An awareness of the resources inherent in different forms of social capital may help to widen the range of policy options designed to build up the capabilities of vulnerable people.

Policies Supporting Life-Course Transitions

Having the right social ties may also make an important difference to the successful negotiation of key life-course transitions and life events.

Examples of key life-course transitions include:
- the passage from school to labour market;
- fundamental changes to one's family (parenthood, marriage, divorce, death);
- retirement; and
- loss of autonomy or ability to care for oneself.

Each of these transitions constitutes a moment of uncertainty and instability that, although common to most people, is experienced with quite varying degrees of success. It is often during those times of change that the importance of having networks of social relations becomes more apparent. These are periods when individuals often need to turn to their existing social networks for support and assistance, or need to develop new social contacts to get the kinds of support and assistance required. The connections that individuals and families rely on can be crucial for helping them manage the risks associated with these transitions and adapt to their new life circumstances. Teenagers may rely heavily on support from their peers when their parents divorce. Support from family and close friends may be pivotal to coping with a major loss, such as a loss of employment, a major physical impairment, or the loss of a loved one. Policies and programs that intervene at some of these key transition points, such as employability assistance programs for youth at risk, older worker adjustment programs, or programs to improve the quality of life of persons facing a loss of autonomy, already affect in many ways the social capital that is available to individuals coping with transitions.

Although we know that networks play an important role in helping individuals to negotiate these key life events, the Canadian data available to public policy planners on their role in key areas is unfortunately limited. Strategies for further investigating the role of social capital in various life-course transitions, including family transformations, are presented in the PRI's reference guide on the measurement of social capital (2005a).

Community Development Policies

The role of community development and urban renewal in promoting economic growth and reducing social inequality is an area of substantial and growing interest for the federal government. Recent emphasis on the social economy as a key sector of community development bears witness to this concern. An area of priority for the government within this area is to support co-operative networks that cut across the private, public, and third sectors, connecting diverse local actors with public authorities at the municipal, provincial, and national levels.

If the concept of social capital has not always been used, it nevertheless remains implicit in a whole range of case studies on the advantages and limits of networks organizing to address community development challenges, both rural and urban. Applying a social capital perspective to community development policy problematiques and program design can help emphasize the positive resources that communities already have. This is highly relevant in a context where governments are increasingly interested in developing partnerships at the local level as a basis for policy development.

Much is already being done to support civic participation and engagement through the promotion of volunteering (see PRI, 2003b). Under a social capital perspective, however, emphasis is placed on finding the most effective ways in which citizens, service delivery agencies, institutions, and organizations interact and create linkages for developing sustainable changes in the living conditions and well-being of community members. It allows focus on a more co-ordinated approach to service delivery, decision making, and problem solving based on a recognition of the role of formal and informal networks. Such networks can act as catalysts for sharing and accessing available resources and assets from inside and outside the community, as well as for generating new resources (e.g., new community-based activities to reduce youth delinquency or new initiatives for stimulating innovative economic development activities).

How Can Social Capital Inform Public Policy?

Insights and lessons from the research and consultations undertaken in this project, and from the thematic policy studies in particular, point to an array of options for integrating social capital into public policy making. Governments have several options for incorporating social capital into policy and program development, which vary in their degree of government involvement. Depending on the issue at hand, one or more of these approaches may be warranted.

- Build and support networks where relevant for specific program objectives.
- Tap into existing social networks to deliver programs.
- Establish favourable conditions.
- Increas program sensitivity to existing patterns of social capital.

Build and Support Networks Where Relevant for Specific Program Objectives

Different types of government programs already incorporate explicit measures to influence or promote network formation as a means for achieving program objectives. Many initiatives contribute to the building of connections between program participants, between community partners or among users and non-users of services. These are found, for example, in employability or job search programs for

Making use of social capital in public policy: from direct to indirect influence

Build &
support
networks

Tap into existing networks
to deliver services

Establish favorable conditions
for desired network formation/maintenance

Increase program sensitivity to existing social capital

DIRECT

INDIRECT
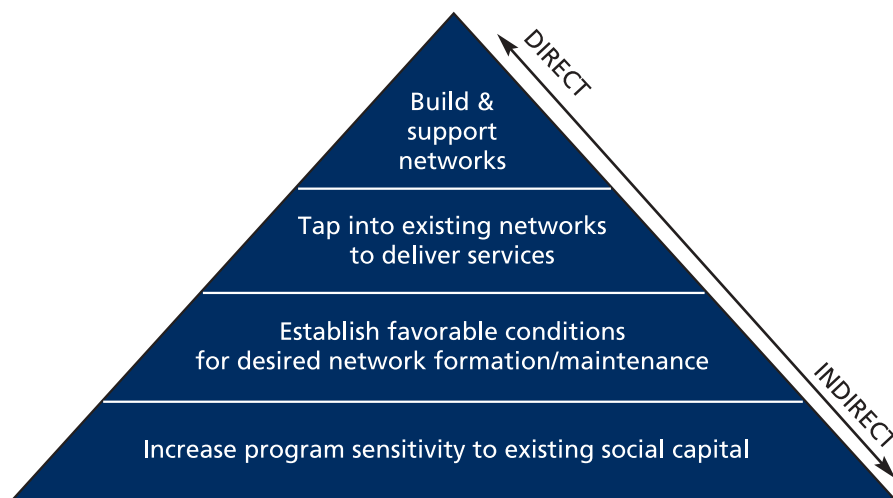
social assistance recipients, integration programs for newly landed immigrants, civic participation forums and exchanges for youth, community crime prevention initiatives linking citizens to police services, or in public health promotion programs. For example, the Community Employment Innovation Project sponsored by the Canadian and Nova Scotia governments seeks to help Employment Insurance or income assistance recipients build social connections that will be useful for future employment opportunities through working on community-based projects. The Host Program, managed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, promotes the creation of bridging networks for newly landed immigrants to facilitate their integration into the receiving community.

In instances where programs have been designed to support or promote the development of social networks, an explicit consideration of social capital effects may mean that we track and evaluate more systematically how these specific network-creation measures have contributed (or not) to the expected outcomes of the program. This could provide useful information on adjustments that could be made to the program and inform future policies on the value and appropriateness of emphasizing the role of certain kinds of networks in particular situations.

Some useful lessons from the field provide good examples of how paying attention to the way networks are actually used by program participants can make a difference in how policy objectives are met.

For example, Keating et al. (2005) have explored how government programs might better support the care networks of seniors. Federal and provincial governments support the general objective of aging well. Aging well includes maintaining positive interactions with one's intimates that support positive emotions. Positive emotions, such as joy, hope, optimism, love, contentment, and gratitude, help us grow as people, energize us for positive action, solve problems, and increase our sense of emotional well-being. However, as seniors in need of care increasingly have no alternative but to depend on their network of closest friends and family members, the positive effect they

derive from these relationships may come under stress. The family members or close relations who provide care often also have other extensive work and family responsibilities. The costs they bear in looking after the care recipient can be considerable, and with these costs the positive emotions associated with their relationships can be considerably diminished which, in turn, serves to undermine the objective of aging well. Keating et al. argued, however, that the burdens placed on these care networks can be reduced through at least two approaches. A first approach is to support directly the care recipients, as through home care, which alleviates the burdens placed on their care network of close friends and family members. A second approach lies in supporting the networks of caregivers directly through such programs as respite care or the compassionate care leave recently introduced by the federal government.

Lévesque (2005) provided another example of how to incorporate a concern with network building activities into government programs. His work on social capital and labour market re-entry for long-term recipients of social assistance has demonstrated the importance of facilitating appropriate social network contacts. Having a network of diverse weak ties is highly beneficial to finding opportunities to re-enter the labour market. However, many programs have been designed and delivered in such a way that participants are in effect only encouraged to form networks with other long-term recipients of social assistance experiencing similar circumstances and with limited access to broader networks. Such homogeneous networks, perhaps useful for other purposes, do not offer much assistance for finding new employment opportunities.

Similar lessons can be found in the case of community development programs that focus efforts on building ties only within the community without sufficiently encouraging linkages with groups or institutions outside the community (i.e., in the case of rural community revitalization programs, or low-resource ethnic communities). Adopting a social capital perspective emphasizes the importance of

delivering programs that also provide opportunities for greater interaction between different groups and contacts outside of the community to increase the diversity of resources available to the network.

Tap into Existing Social Networks to Deliver Program Services

In some instances, government programs may need to tap into existing social networks to achieve program objectives. Within the field of public health promotion, for example, efforts have been made to identify influential figures within social networks to influence health-related behaviours of those networks.

For instance, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States support a program initiative by the name of Popular Opinion Leader (POL): A Community AIDS/HIV Risk Reduction Program for Gay Men. Most evaluated programs for HIV-prevention in the United States have involved intensive face-to-face assistance with behaviour change for individuals or small groups at risk of infection. This program represents an attempt to prevent HIV infection at a community level with the potential to reach large numbers of people in a cost-effective manner. The program works through recruiting popular opinion leaders within the social networks of gay men in various US cities. These peer-groups leaders are trained to be experts on HIV-risk reduction and to deliver key health messages to their peers. An evaluation of the program (Kelly et al., 1997) showed that conversational messages delivered by popular opinion leaders successfully influenced the sexual-risk behaviour of others in their social network. Population-level rates of risk behaviour decreased significantly in the intervention cities compared with the control cities.

Within the United Kingdom, a similar approach has been taken to combat rising rates of smoking among teenagers. The ASSIST (A Stop Smoking in Schools Trial) study is a large-scale randomized controlled trial of the effectiveness of a school-based, peer-led training program aimed at changing the smoking behaviour of secondary school pupils using their

established social networks. Peer-nominated students in Year 8 (aged 12-13) were recruited as peer supporters and given intensive training off the school premises by professional health promotion staff. The peer supporters were trained to intervene informally with their Year 8 peers in everyday situations to discourage them from smoking. Preliminary evaluations suggest this approach may hold promise for anti-smoking efforts (Holliday et al., 2005).

Establish Favourable Conditions

There are instances where it may be more helpful for public programs to invest in establishing broad, favourable conditions for the generation of social capital rather than attempting to shape network development directly. There are at least two ways in which this can be encouraged: through enhanced opportunities and capacities for social interaction and through the assistance of social "brokers" or "entrepreneurs."

Support/Enable Opportunities for Social Interaction

Individual relational skills and community capabilities

Developing networks of more diverse social ties and linkages outside immediate circles can be very challenging for certain individuals, groups, and communities. One way to facilitate this process may be through supporting the development of individualized relational skills and community capabilities. Some individuals and groups, particularly among the least advantaged, may have difficulty in developing social ties and engaging in reciprocal relationships. In situations where there is a history of family breakdowns, social isolation, and dysfunctional relationships, it is often very difficult to develop the kind of trust and relational skills necessary to forge and maintain new and more diversified social relations. Certain programs may be offered to assist such individuals in rebuilding some of these relational skills before engaging in more formal network-building activities, such as in the context of labour market integration initiatives. Recognizing the need for building social skills (and aptitudes for working

co-operatively) early on in childhood and adolescence also emerged as a recommendation during the project. Young children, especially those at risk of having difficulty in forming positive social connections, may benefit from various recreational and after-school programs where they are able to interact positively with other children and youth:

> One of the best ways to promote the creation of informal relationships (one of the initial conditions to setting up a group network) is to encourage students to pursue their schooling. Indeed, analyses that focus on the intersecting dynamics of social relations and life trajectories demonstrate that an individual's social network develops particularly during the schooling years, and that the many weak ties which are so important to setting up a social network, are often born of relationships created during post-secondary education (Charbonneau, 2005).

Individuals and community groups may also have difficulty forming social ties and reciprocal relationships, due to historical context and cultural differences. A relevant example comes from Matthews and Côté (2005) in their study of social capital in the context of Aboriginal community policing. While the development of social ties between Aboriginal police officers and community members and links to the police officer's own ties outside the community are determinants for a successful level of police service, the study clearly emphasizes the importance of developing cultural awareness and building trust at the level of the individual police officer (as opposed to the larger police institution), as prerequisites before social capital building can start taking place. "[I]n many circumstances where Aboriginal policing takes place, it is quite likely that cultural awareness by police officers is a necessary precondition for building successful networks, linkages, and partnerships within and outside the community" (Matthews and Côté, 2005).

Public infrastructure

Governments may also foster favourable conditions for developing useful sources of social capital by investing in public infrastructure. A common theme in the social capital literature has been the promotion of public spaces and other infrastructure as a means of supporting opportunities for social interaction. Affordable public recreation facilities, community centres, and mixed housing development are all instances of potentially social capital generating investments.

This said, such investments need to be accompanied by evaluations of how successful or not they are in generating the kinds of social interactions that can lead to development of new resources for individuals or groups. It may be that such infrastructure is a necessary but insufficient condition for the development and maintenance of social ties. Even if new spaces for connecting citizens are available, it does not mean that on their own they will be enough for ensuring greater social interaction and participation in associational life. For example, in a 1997 study of the effects of scattered-site public housing in Yonkers, New York, Briggs (1997) found that moving families out of areas of concentrated disadvantage and ethnic isolation into new public housing in the more affluent and mixed-ethnicity Yonkers neighbourhoods did not necessarily lead to new social connections for these families. Instead, they continued to retain their connections to their old neighbourhood – where they retained strong social ties through their local churches, and community-based institutions – and did not develop bridging links with their new and more affluent neighbours. This suggests the need for a close evaluation of how such infrastructure design may need to be accompanied with investments in other complementary resources to be effective in establishing the kinds of social capital ties that may lead to desired socio-economic outcomes.

Brokerage and Facilitation of Networks and Partnerships

One potential complementary resource to investment in public spaces and infrastructure involves supporting social brokers or entrepreneurs. These are the

coaches, the neighbourhood activists, and the local leaders who can play the role of community broker by breathing life into public spaces and facilitating social connections and alliances. Such local leaders (especially non-traditional leaders) could be supported through initiatives that recognize their role and contribution in creating linkages and mobilizing community networks.

Public service representatives can also play the role of mediator between networks. Given that many policy objectives, such as poverty reduction, crime prevention, or elder care, have a complex dynamic requiring a multi-sectoral approach, the ability of front-line workers to assess fully the needs of individual service recipients and broker access to other networks, services, and opportunities can be critically important. This could include, for example, in the context of community crime prevention programs, the role played by police liaison officers in linking at-risk youth and adults to organizations and networks favouring a transition into pro-social relationships and employment.

This also includes efforts to provide the necessary assistance and tools for communities to develop their own co-operative networks. As indicated by community development representatives interested in the concept of social capital, the ability and opportunity to build network connections requires a certain level of prior knowledge, trust, and self-assurance. Highly disadvantaged community groups may require supports and encouragement to develop the necessary skills and confidence in their own capacity to influence change, before being able to develop co-operative networks and reach out to other groups and organizations.

Investing in greater linking social capital between public service providers and recipients is not a simple matter, however. Real tensions exist, for example, between attempts to act as social brokers on the one hand, and the need for the government to remain and be seen as impartial on the other. This point was made in particular by Matthews and Côté (2005) in their study of Aboriginal community policing, where police officers deeply embedded in the local community may be under considerable stress in upholding the impartiality of their office.

Brokering Social Capital Networks for Crime Prevention

"Given the reported widespread fear of intimidation and related bullying in schools, police school liaison officers can provide early intervention assistance at the middle school level where the absence of positive family and peer informal networks are associated with increased criminality. This form of social capital will likely be more important given the trend toward increased single-parent families, ethnic/racial diversity, the competitive environment for employment, and the apparent negative impact of the popular media in possibly accentuating the likelihood of violence for those children and adolescents already displaying early and persistent aggression and violence. …"

"Overall, … it appears that social capital programs should continue or be established for vulnerable groups living in urban areas, including marginalized families of recent immigrants, Aboriginal families, those who are homeless, and street youth. Informal networks developed in programs, such as the National Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, along with linkages to formal government and non-government resource networks are vitally important in allowing high-risk youth and adults to make the transition into pro-social relationships and employment, thus increasing the communities' potential to reduce crime and social disorder."

Source: Corrado et al. (2005).

In the context of community development partnerships, Charbonneau (2005) found that successful initiatives were those in which governments left the direction of such activities to local level networks, and restricted themselves to providing reliable funding and expertise (including as mediators between networks) to the local organizations. The existence of previous informal relations among members of a

network is an important condition for the success of community-based networks. According to Charbonneau, efforts to support local network formation by government representatives should encourage community initiatives that are already based on pre-existing collaborative relations. Government representatives (who have been involved in the community for some time) can play an important intermediary role by helping to facilitate linkages between groups, though it may often be necessary to remove themselves from the network once it is functioning.

Increasing Program Sensitivity to Existing Patterns of Social Capital

This approach involves gathering and integrating information about existing social networks into policy and program design, implementation, and evaluation. The goal would be to raise the awareness of policy makers and decision makers about the potential impacts of new interventions or changes in policy directions on the social capital already present in communities.

We know very little about the consequences that certain practices can have on the social networks of participants and non-participants (or service users). In other words, a social capital lens may also simply assist in a better understanding of the interactions between policies and social relationships. This could help to ensure that programs and policies across government do not work at cross-purposes in the ways in which they incorporate or affect social capital. Seemingly unrelated government interventions (e.g., in areas of transportation, housing, etc.) might actually undermine the very social capital resources that other programs are counting on to achieve their objectives.

In some cases, for example, this could be achieved through a more conscious assessment of the type and level of social capital available to the individuals and groups targeted by interventions. Case workers might usefully consider the social capital profile of clients as part of a broader consideration of the clients' needs, as in employability programs for persons with disabilities, or support programs for teenage moms. This would ensure, for example, that program activities include members of social networks when relevant or avoid burdening fragile networks with demands for extensive support. In discussion with the PRI, Perri 6 noted that a number of public professionals in the United Kingdom have a long history of subtle thinking and skill with regard to considering people's social networks and how they relate to their well-being, as in probation services and some care programs. But he worried that this capacity for pastoral support had been undermined and devalued in recent decades in that country, in favour of an emphasis on individualized training and financial support.

Program designers might also benefit from a greater awareness of, and sensitivity to, local social network dynamics. Direct interventions without the buy-in of the community can create tensions between governments and the local groups responsible for delivering services. Instead of imposing top-down empowerment objectives, several experts who contributed to our project have stressed that often policies and programs not only need to be highly sensitive to local context, but also depend on the creation of linkages with local groups if they are to be successful. White et al. (2005), for example, recounted how efforts to promote preschool programs for Maori youth in New Zealand were only successful after government officials first built up personal informal links with local communities and families as a precursor to enabling Maori parents to set up their own early childhood programs.

Damaging Existing Social Capital

"In the case of Port Harrison in Canada, the movement of the community to a new location led to the destruction of social capital as it broke the ties between elders and the young. Parents and elders used to teach the young how to hunt and build ice houses. The relocation to a place where there were no hunting possibilities led to a break-up of the traditional system where young people travelled with elder hunters, learning many skills, such as language and traditions, during the hunting season. Before the move, the community had high levels of educational attainment, because in the off-season, the community studied at the school. After the relocation, this community spiralled downward as evidenced by many social indicators: suicide increased, school non-attendance became endemic, fertility rates declined, and rates of illness rose. The state had destroyed, perhaps inadvertently, the social capital of the community."

Source: White et al. (2005).

KEY MESSAGES ON POLICY APPLICATIONS

1. Governments inevitably affect patterns of social capital; an explicit focus on social capital allows governments to do so more effectively in keeping with policy and program objectives.

2. A social capital approach may be particularly fruitful for policies and programs helping populations at risk of social exclusion, supporting key life-course transitions, and promoting community development efforts.

3. While governments may have a role in directly supporting the development or maintenance of social capital as a means of achieving program objectives or working with existing networks to deliver services, they may also incorporate a social capital dimension through establishing favourable conditions for the development of useful networks and through a greater sensitivity toward the interactions between policies and existing social capital.

4. MEASURING THE INTANGIBLE?

Social Capital as an Approach to Research and Analysis

Social capital provides a rich new means for looking at how public intervention and government services can focus on social ties as a potentially important ingredient in individual and societal prosperity. Networks of co-operation exist at various levels and in various spheres of concern to public policy. Through a more systematic understanding of these networks and their relational dynamics, governments will be able to concretely operationalize this concept.

But where do we begin? Empirically, recording the various manifestations of social capital and its modes of functioning is not always a simple matter. Over the last few years, several government organizations (in Canada and abroad) have made greater efforts to measure social capital in the population and generate data that reveal its major dimensions. Various approaches have been explored, from case studies to the development of major trend indicators (e.g., social and civic participation rates) created on the basis of survey data.

In 2004, Canada produced its first major survey devoted to the theme of social engagement and social capital. The General Social Survey on Social Engagement (Cycle 17) innovatively integrated within a single database several major dimensions of social capital cited in the literature: rates of social and civic participation, degree of trust, typology of mutual support and reciprocity practices, sense of security, and sense of belonging. This approach opens up the possibility of a detailed exploration of key determining factors – or sources – of social capital in various segments of Canadian society. In this instance, the concept is primarily understood as a dependent variable, that is, an end result.

From a public policy perspective, this "macro" approach seeks to inform the discussion on the institutional preconditions for participation and social cohesion. It does not, however, open up the possibility of exploring the contribution of social capital as an independent variable, that is, as a factor that explains certain key results. In fact, it contains only a limited number of measures of social, economic, or health results relevant to public policy, measures that could have been correlated with various dimensions of social capital. Moreover, the Survey provides limited data on social networks. These limitations may have consequences for the analytical scope and subsequent relevance of the concept of social capital for certain government departments.

While recognizing the value of this and other similar approaches in documenting sources and forms of social capital, the PRI took an alternative approach by addressing social capital in its role in – or its contribution to – attaining certain socio-economic or health results relevant to social policy. In other words, the PRI has examined the concept as an independent, explanatory variable. In taking a "meso" approach to social capital that focuses on the strategic role of social networks in providing access to resources and support, measurement considerations focus on significantly different variables than those that have been of interest to many social capital researchers so far. Thus, the PRI's work on the measurement of social capital has focused on an examination of the various properties of individual and group networks and the ways in which they function in specific circumstances.

An empirical approach to social capital based on social networks offers a number of methodological advantages.

A Tangible Subject of Investigation

Networks of social relations constitute a tangible object of investigation that saves the analyst from having to use arbitrary combinations of diverse variables as weak indicators of more intangible understandings of social capital, such as "the glue that holds society together." Relational networks are the empirical counterpart to social ties; they are the material we can use systematically to document the resources and support that circulate, or not, among individuals and groups.

A Coherent Integration of Variables

A network-based approach still offers an access point to all of the elements traditionally related to less tangible approaches to social capital, such as

socialization, voting, volunteer involvement, trust and reciprocity. Looking at an individual's relational fabric (or that of a group) opens up the possibility of addressing all the major issues related to the concept: sociability or social isolation, peer pressure, sources of support and offers of support, and the spectrum of civic contributions and the benefits they generate individually (creation of contacts) and collectively (group dynamics and vitality of local communities). It allows an analyst to empirically examine the inter-relationships between these phenomena without suggesting they constitute a single entity.

Relationships as a Unit of Analysis, at the Individual and Collective Level

Major household surveys that seek to measure social capital do not typically draw a distinction between the individual and collective benefits of participation. They imply that the aggregate of individual social capital is sufficient to estimate the social capital of a community or, indeed, a nation. The participation practices of individuals, however, contribute only partially to the social capital of a community. More specifically, they cannot provide conclusive informa-tion about the associational framework of a commu-nity primarily because they do not shed light on the dynamic that exists between the groups and organiza-tions to which individuals belong. It is this dynamic that constitutes a community's true social capital.

While interrelated, it is important to distinguish between *individual social capital* and *collective social capital*, which constitute two separate research subjects. At the individual level, social capital refers to the benefits that individuals derive from their networks of social relations. Collective social capital refers to the benefits that the commu-nity derives from associational dynamics connecting groups and associations. The unit of analysis, namely the *relationship*, is measured the same way regard-less of the type of network in question. Consequently, the size of an individual's network (the number of relationships the individual has with various people) is of as much analytical importance as the size of the network of a community group (in this instance, the number of other organizations with which this group interacts).

Generating Useful Information for Public Policy

The following three major research directions will help governments focus more on the role of social capital in improving the conditions of individuals in certain situations.

- Investigate the manifestations of social capital, both at the individual and group level, by more systematically documenting which types of social networks are relevant depending on the area of intervention. Under what circumstances are dense networks more useful? What are the circum-stances under which weak and diversified ties make a difference?

- Investigate how social capital operates by taking a closer look at the conditions for creating social relationships, as well as the obstacles to their development; and the functioning of social net-works, as well as the conditions that enable them to be mobilized under different life circumstances and among different population subgroups.

- Place more emphasis on the contribution of social capital to specific issues by exploring the strong hypotheses in current Canadian research with respect to the presence of certain types of networks and the attainment of results in specific contexts.

At this stage of social capital research, the PRI recommends the simultaneous implementation of these three research directions, at several stages in the development of policies and programs already underway. This can be done by:

- adding complementary questions to existing or future surveys;

- including certain aspects of social capital to be documented in case studies funded by government research departments; or

- integrating new performance indicators into pro-gram evaluations.

Since the measurement of social capital is still in its infancy, it is unrealistic to expect a single tool to assess all the research hypotheses about the role of social capital in various spheres of society. It is more

realistic to hope that we are in the process of building up knowledge on the basis of several empirical sources (case studies, statistical data, social demonstration projects, etc.).

Measuring Different Aspects of Social Capital

Major strides have been made over the last few years to develop relatively simple and proven techniques for measuring various aspects of networks. The generators (name, position, resource or context-based generator) constitute a set of techniques that, whether used on their own or combined, can produce a range of data to paint a portrait of networks and then to understand how they work. A generator is made up of a series of questions such as "name the people with whom you …" that can be used to create a matrix of social relationships for analysis. One of the values of these tools is that they can be adapted to qualitative methodology as well as to more standard statistical survey tools.

Several concepts developed in the analysis of social networks resonate surprisingly well with social capital vocabulary. For example, the concepts of bonding, bridging, and linking, as discussed above can be grasped by studying network density (the interconnection between individuals), the intensity of relationships (weak or strong) and the diversity of members (e.g., socio-economic status of members). Other concepts related to the dynamic properties of networks are also useful for documenting the manner in which social capital operates to produce results, including the conditions for network mobilization, the rules of network functioning, the norms that govern the circulation of exchanges within networks, and so on.

For a more in-depth discussion of the use of these tools, see PRI (2005a).

Investing in the Development of Innovative Tools

The choice of tools to measure social capital largely depends on public policy objectives and the needs specific to each area of intervention.

Vulnerable Populations

The role of social capital among populations vulnerable to exclusion can be explored on the basis of thematic statistical surveys by using certain social network measurement techniques adapted to different realities. Using qualitative methodology within statistical surveys or using "dynamic" variables (that is, variables that give an idea of the functioning of networks among vulnerable populations under certain circumstances) are options worth exploring. Social experimentation projects, such as the Community Employment Innovation Project in Cape Breton, that include networks as a control variable and can take into account the role of context are also an avenue worth pursuing to develop a better understanding of the differential impact of intervention programs among vulnerable populations.

Life Transitions

Networks play an important role in helping individuals overcome major transitions in their lives, yet the data currently available in Canada do not tell us how. It would be possible to develop and include a set of standardized questions on social networks in various longitudinal surveys on life transitions. This would help to guide the development of programs designed to maximize the potential of networks as complementary resources for individuals.

Community Development

When it comes to collective social capital, community development and the social economy are sectors that the federal government is increasingly focusing on to find solutions adapted to the problems of local communities. It would be wise for the government to better evaluate the potential of

networks of co-operation that emerge between the various players involved, whether they are local or regional groups, public bodies, businesses or other civil society actors. In terms of research strategy, the use of surveys among groups and associations could provide information on the associational dynamics that result from collective networks. Case studies based on both survey data and other sources of information could also be relevant for developing a better understanding of how context contributes to the growth or explains the decline of certain communities. A meta analysis of social capital related evaluation work already available is another, less costly option, that could shed new light on well-documented cases.

KEY MESSAGES ON SOCIAL CAPITAL RESEARCH

1. In public policy research, investigate social capital not only as a dependent variable, but also as an explanatory variable that can contribute to the understanding of a specific research question

2. The unit of analysis is not an individual, group or community. Rather it is the social relations between these entities.

3. Empirical investigation should focus on network structure (the presence of social capital) and on network dynamics (how social capital operates).

4. In recent years, important developments have produced a series of relatively simple and proven techniques to measure many aspects of networks (name generator, position generator, etc.).

5. The choice of a research strategy strongly depends on public policy objectives and on the specific needs of different policy domains. In order to advance research on individual and collective social capital, new innovative instruments can be combined with more traditional research methods.

CONCLUSION

A focus on social capital allows public authorities to consider the importance of non-material assets in social policy. It is about getting the social dimension right. This means creating new opportunities, or at least not disrupting existing opportunities, for connecting people with others in ways that are beneficial for the individuals and for the community. This requires, at a minimum, a focus on the impacts of policies on networks of social relationships, and being aware of the importance of preserving or protecting social ties, without draining their resources.

Making networks visible as we develop and evaluate programs reminds us that these networks are real in people's lives. A focus on social networks and relationships allows governments to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of social participation, or the conditions under which participation can occur.

Incorporating social capital as a policy tool will not solve all outstanding social policy challenges. But it may help make a difference. Government policies and programs already affect, and are in turn affected by, patterns of social capital. Integrating a more explicit consideration of social capital into the research, design, development, and evaluation of programs will assist public authorities in making better choices in the pursuit of social policy objectives. The PRI's social capital project has shown that it is possible to do just that.

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APPENDIX 1

PRI Social Capital Project Publications
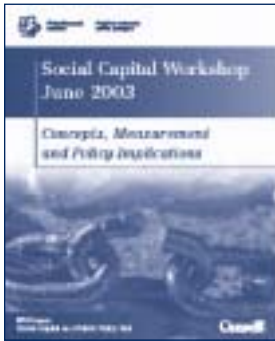
June 2003
Social Capital Workshop: Concepts, Measurement and Policy Implications

This document reports on the findings from an interdepartmental consultation network held in 2003, and includes the background papers prepared for the event.

October 2003
Social Capital: Building on a Network-Based Approach

This draft discussion paper presents the conceptual framework developed by the PRI in consultation with government and academic experts.

November 2003
Horizons: Social Capital

This Horizons issue on social capital highlights preliminary findings from the PRI's Social Capital project, as well as bringing to the fore recent social capital research from Australia, New Zealand, and across Canada.

March 2004
The Opportunity and Challenge of Diversity: A Role for Social Capital?

This report provides a synthesis of the key issues discussed at a PRI-OECD conference held in November 2003 on the relationship between social capital and the management of immigrant integration and diversity.

September 2004
Expert Workshop on the Measurement of Social Capital for Public Policy

This synthesis report outlines the presentations and discussions at a June 2004 expert workshop on developing a "toolbox" for measuring social capital in a public policy context.

September 2005
Social Capital as a Public Policy Tool: Project Report

This project report provides a synthesis of the key findings from the PRI social capital project in the areas of conceptualization, implications for public policy, and measurement efforts.

September 2005
Social Capital in Action: Thematic Policy Studies

The project established interdepartmental working groups to oversee the development of a series of thematic policy studies by experts on the best available evidence in areas of strategic importance to the Government of Canada. Eight specific policy and program areas are examined in a Canadian context: poverty reduction, healthy aging, settlement of new immigrants, educational outcomes of Aboriginal youth, youth civic engagement, community crime prevention, policing in First Nations communities, and the role of local associations in community development.

September 2005
Measurement of Social Capital: Reference Document for Public Policy Research, Development, and Evaluation

This report provides an overview of efforts to measure social capital and concludes with key recommendations for future research initiatives in a public policy context.

APPENDIX 2

Key Milestones and Activities of the Social Capital Project

2003	
January 10	ADM launch meeting
January - April	Bilateral meetings with departments
January-June	Scanning, consultation and literature review
February 27	Multilateral meeting of departmental partners to the PRI-OECD conference
March 18	Participation in Metropolis Workshop on Religion and Social Capital
March 21-24	Session at Metropolis conference
March 26	Interdepartmental working group meeting
May 22-23	Participation in OECD workshops on social capital measurement (Budapest)
May 30	Background papers produced: Concept, Measurement, Policy
June 11	Social cohesion workshop on social capital
June 19	Interdepartmental consultation workshop on social capital
July 8	ADM advisory committee meeting
August 20	Social capital sessions at Queen's International Institute on Social Policy (Kingston)
September	Release of discussion paper and analytical framework: "Social Capital: Building on a Network-Based Approach"
September 11	Participation in Statistic Canada's working group on social capital
September 15-19	Session at International Metropolis Conference (Vienna)
October 20	PRI-SSHRC Policy Research Roundtable on social capital
November	Release of social capital issue of Horizons
November 23	Pre-conference workshop on social capital data and research issues (Montreal)
November 24-25	PRI-OECD conference on social capital, diversity and immigrant integration (Montreal)

2004	
March	PRI-OECD conference synthesis report released
March 29	Presentation to Foreign Policy Centre (UK) and Barrow Cadbury Trust Seminar on International Social Capital (London)
March 31	Wellman and Erickson reports on social capital measurement
April 13	ADM advisory committee meeting
May 6	Presentation at the Canadian Community Economic Development Network Annual Conference
June	Release of special issue of the Journal of International Migration and Integration (JIMI)
June 8	Expert workshop on social capital measurement strategies
September 20	Social cohesion workshop on data from the General Social Survey on Social Engagement
November 5	Roundtable with researchers and departmental partners involved in thematic policy studies
December 13-15	Social capital sessions at PRI social policy conference (Ottawa)

2005	
June 16	ADM advisory committee meeting
September	Release of final PRI publications (project report, measurement reference document, and compilation of thematic policy studies)