

## **APPENDIX: CHANGING THE WIND - SAGUARO SEMINAR VALUES**

We began the Saguaro Seminar project believing that social capital – social networks and the bonds of trust and reciprocity that facilitate collective action – is a resource available for both positive and negative ends. Much as financial capital could be used by an individual to start an environmental clean-up firm (a social good) or to stockpile nerve gas (a social bad), social capital could be used by neighborhoods to build a playground or by groups like the Ku Klux Klan to terrorize minority groups. Despite its potential for abuse, we believe that social capital is used primarily for positive ends. There are far more Girl Scout troops in America than there are militia groups. Our conversations over two years made evident that the specific social capital building strategies endorsed by group members invariably were shaped by our individual and collective values. We thus thought it helpful to be explicit about the values that unite our effort. While we hope that others share these values, we list them not to be prescriptive or proselytizing.

We've taken our title "Changing the Wind" from one of our participants, who noted that politics too often is organized around replacing one wet-fingered politician (testing the winds of public opinion) with another. We need to think about *changing* the civic wind, not merely figuring out (in the manner of the stereotypical politician) which way the wind is blowing. Our hope is that this report, in conjunction with the efforts of millions of concerned Americans, can help to turn the vicious cycle of social-capital depletion into a virtuous circle of growth and renewal.

### **An Instrumental View of Social Capital**

We care about increasing social capital at least in part because it is a vital resource for achieving societal goals. Scores of academic studies confirm that trust and civic engagement lubricate society's institutions. In so doing, social capital helps to ensure quality education, a more engaged citizenry and more accountable public decision makers, longer and healthier lives, reduced crime and violence, economic development and growth, increased tolerance and understanding among diverse groups of people, and even greater citizen compliance with laws. More social capital means broader generalized reciprocity, greater honesty toward others, and a more expansive sense of the "self." Social capital also helps to combat materialism and self-centeredness, two values that seem increasingly prevalent in our economically robust times.

While we support social capital building strategies that don't necessarily solve pressing societal problems directly, we prefer strategies that simultaneously address pressing social problems *and* build social capital, such as crime watch groups, revolving credit associations, and parent-teacher associations. Our group is confident that the former (groups like choral societies) enlarge the stock of social capital and are likely to have indirect, long-term effects on ameliorating pressing social issues. We must be cautious that strategies to increase the latter (e.g., parent-teacher associations) often seem like "civic castor oil"– bolstering America's civic health but appealing only to a narrow slice of Americans, the civic do-gooders. Faced with a choice between social capital building strategies that might attract hundreds of thousands of people, even without directly addressing America's pressing problems, and civic do-gooding ideas that attract relatively few, we favor the former. Of course, groups oriented toward solving civic problems with broadly appealing methods are our ideal choice, since they provide a "double bang for the buck"

Our desire to reinvigorate American civic life is not an exercise in nostalgia. We do not seek to recreate the 1950s, even in an airbrushed version without sexism and oppression of racial or cultural minorities. We seek participation, not conformity. We hope to reinvigorate our long tradition of strong communities within the realities, both positive and negative, of the recent technological, social, and economic changes in American society.

*Values to foster.* Our key goal is to foster greater reciprocity in our dealings with one another. Greater reciprocity will build and strengthen earned trust, rather than forging a Potemkin Village of untrustworthy citizens. Within this goal of greater collective effort and reciprocity, however, we respect individuality, and the freedom not to join (with no moral stigma for non-joiners). We hope to forge more social capital without undermining our ability to be distinct individuals.

*Types of social capital we support or oppose.* Social trust and connectedness in America are far more common among Americans of similar a race, ethnicity, class, age, or religion than among people who are different from one another. We believe that society benefits immeasurably by creating opportunities for “bridging social capital,” bringing citizens together *across* these differences. This bridging social capital helps to forge common ground and promote citizen responsibility and engagement. Nevertheless, we believe that it is human nature to seek out people like oneself; the maxim “birds of a feather flock together” embodies deeper undercurrents of human behavior. Therefore “non-bridging” (or “bonding”) forms of trust will always be more prevalent than “bridging” bonds. In most cases, social-capital connections will involve people with some similarities and some differences (such as the varied ethnicities of alumna from a women’s college, or the varied socioeconomic backgrounds of members of a Catholic fraternal group). Such mixed forms of bridging and bonding social capital may represent the most practical way of meeting our twin goals of greatly increasing community connectedness while multiplying our interactions with people unlike ourselves.

In sum, we support all social capital strategies, as long as groups that are privileged or advantaged do not demonize those who don’t or can’t belong. We seek strategies that will raise the aggregate level of trustworthiness and trust in society.<sup>1</sup> We also believe that many efforts that begin as non-bridging social capital (for example ethnic associations) will lead to bridging social capital (for example, searching for allies in issue-based coalitions).

*Tolerance and deliberation.* Many people would rather change others than tolerate their errors, but we believe we should tolerate if we can’t persuade. Bridging social capital will only have value if we learn from our differences, even where such learning doesn’t produce agreement. We want to expand social capital not only because it has practical uses, such as improving public health and making streets safer, but also because it creates the deliberative space that promotes greater understanding. This greater understanding, ultimately, will enable Americans to reach agreement on policies that will improve our nation for all citizens.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thus, a strategy to boost the Mafia or Crips and Bloods would fail this test, but one to assist Hadassah or an all African-American church might pass.