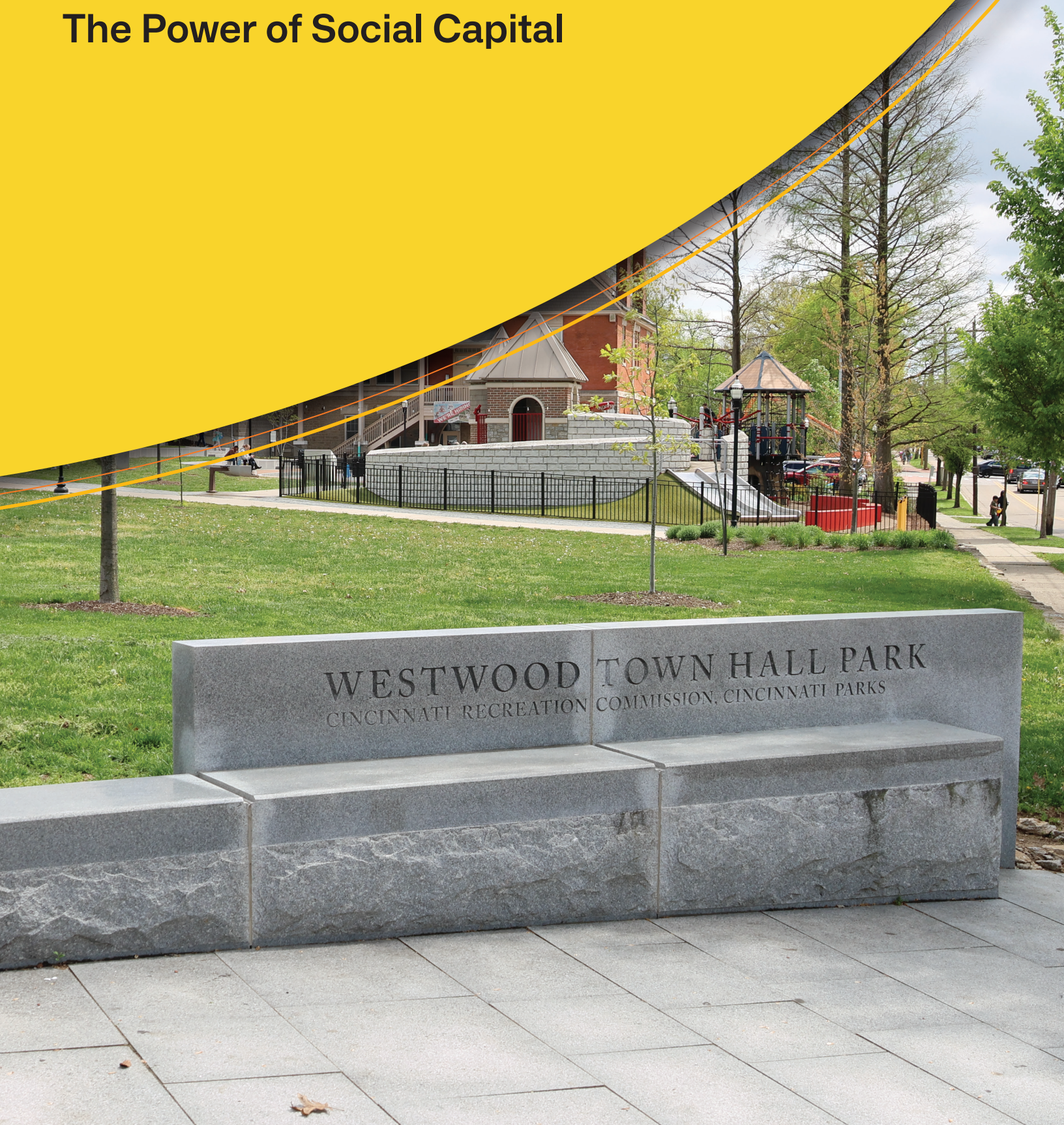




BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

The Power of Social Capital



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INTRODUCTION

Collective impact in local community-based efforts involves building a shared vision and goals, inclusive stakeholder engagement and localized solutions. We saw a critical need to understand the community's perspective on belonging and social connectedness to inform collective impact strategies and place-based solutions. Belonging means all people feel seen, heard, believed, trusted and respected. Most importantly, it creates a sense of shared ownership. To enhance our work in this area, we wanted to explore what matters to people who live and work in the region. We also wanted to get a sense of how much power people feel they have to improve their community—a concept known as social capital. In 2024, United Way of Greater Cincinnati supported efforts to measure social capital both regionally and through a focused examination of three specific communities: Springdale, Westwood and Lincoln Heights. **The following is a summary of this work and the ways in which the community reinforces where and how our work is activated. The findings are limited in scope due to the exploratory nature of this survey.**

Social Capital: What It Is and Why It Matters Now

Social capital is a vital resource that helps individuals and communities grow and thrive. Just as financial capital accumulates through investments in banks, social capital grows when people invest in relationships and engage with organizations that cultivate collaboration and support. Social capital emerges through networks and connections — neighbors supporting one another, volunteering, joining community councils, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and other civic organizations.

The concept of social capital is well-documented in sociology and economics, emphasizing the power of relationships, shared values and mutual trust. Communities rich in social capital experience stronger bonds, greater resilience and a heightened ability to drive positive community change. Research consistently shows communities where residents feel connected are better-equipped to manage challenges and foster meaningful progress.

However, social capital is declining. Robert Putnam's 2000 book, *Bowling Alone*, described a decline in social capital across the United States — a worsening trend since the COVID-19 pandemic. Research from Interact for Health's *Our Health, Our Opportunity* report (2024) highlights a concerning rise in isolation:

- More people in our region now live alone.
- Membership in civic, religious and social organizations is declining faster locally than the national average.

- Fewer than half of adults in 2017 described their communities as "dependable" or "highly supportive."

Given the relationship between social capital and community resilience, United Way and partners focused on better understanding the state of connectedness in Cincinnati.

What Other Local Research Tells Us

In its *2024 State of the Region* report, the Cincinnati Regional Chamber emphasized the importance of social capital and connectedness in attracting and retaining millennial and Generation Z populations. The Chamber highlights while Cincinnati ranks in the top half among peer regions for Gen Z population, it falls in the bottom half for millennials. This disparity underscores the need for strategies that not only draw young talent but also encourage them to establish lasting roots in the region.

The Chamber's initiatives focus on advancing inclusive economic growth and community engagement, recognizing a strong sense of belonging and robust social networks are critical factors for millennials and Gen Z when choosing where to live and work. By enhancing social capital through community-building efforts and supporting diverse talent, the Chamber aims to make Cincinnati a more attractive and supportive environment for these younger demographics.

The *Our Health, Our Opportunity* report by Interact for Health underscores the critical role of social capital in enhancing community health outcomes. The report highlights social vulnerability — shaped by factors such as unemployment, poverty and crowded housing — significantly influences health disparities across neighborhoods. By nurturing strong social networks and community engagement, the report suggests communities can mitigate these vulnerabilities, leading to improved health and well-being for all residents.

The report emphasizes the importance of addressing systemic structures that undermine health and well-being. By promoting policies and initiatives that build social capital, communities can create environments where every individual has the opportunity to lead a healthy and fulfilling life, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Our Health, Our Opportunity advocates leveraging social capital as a foundational strategy to achieve equitable health outcomes and to bridge the life-expectancy gaps observed between neighborhoods in the Greater Cincinnati region.

How We Measure Social Capital

Measuring social capital is complex, as traditional census data does not capture individuals' sense of belonging or neighborhood connectivity. To bridge this gap, the Place Matters initiative developed a social capital survey initially conducted in Price Hill, Avondale, Walnut Hills and Covington. Place Matters surveys were conducted in 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2022. The 2024 regional survey and surveys in Westwood, Springdale and Lincoln Heights represent the fifth iteration of social capital assessments in Greater Cincinnati. The survey, based on the Social Capital Building Toolkit (2006), examines:

- Residents' connections to their community and neighbors
- Perceptions of neighborhood health
- Key issues affecting families and communities
- Demographic insights to understand community dynamics

Why Belonging Matters

United Way, Interact for Health and other community partners explored how social isolation contributes to poor community outcomes. Their research illustrates the essential role of belonging, place and identity in shaping an individual's ability to thrive. Strong social networks empower people to access resources, build resilience and amplify a sense of shared responsibility for their communities.

Social capital comes in three key forms:

- **Bonding Social Capital:** Strengthens close-knit communities, enhancing a sense of belonging
- **Bridging Social Capital:** Connects diverse groups, reinforcing a shared sense of place
- **Linking Social Capital:** Facilitates connections between communities and power structures, increasing access to essential resources

Communities cultivating all three types of social capital are more successful in managing challenges and reinforcing sustainable growth. Communities with a culture and practice of building these kinds of social networks are more successful at addressing issues as they develop. Communities that create places and spaces that foster a sense of belonging among individuals and families help people thrive.

Decades of Investment in Social Capital

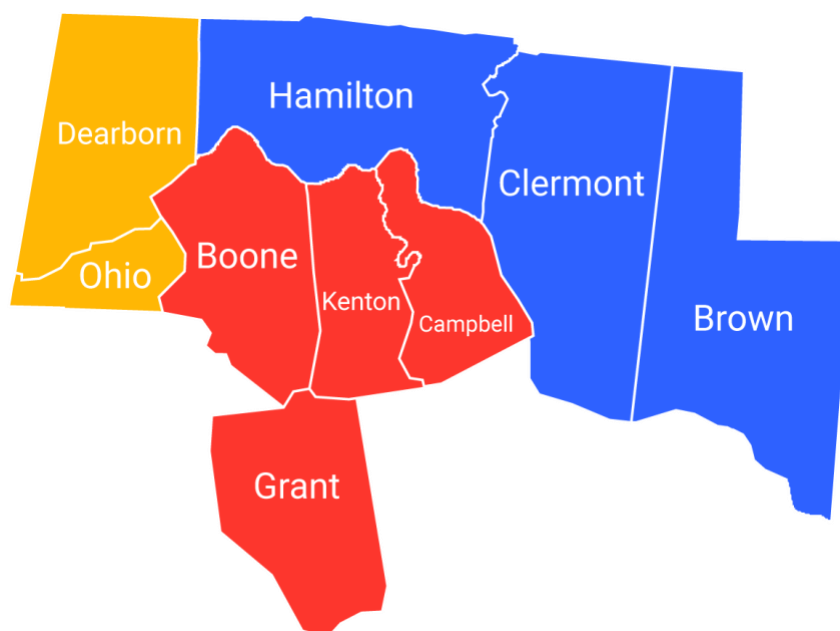
For more than 20 years, organizations like United Way, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and Greater Cincinnati Foundation have recognized the importance

of social capital in their place-based investment strategies, including Place Matters¹. These initiatives help develop housing, support small businesses and revitalize business districts — intentionally building social networks and community cohesion.

Through resident surveys conducted by LISC and its lead organizations, we learned that when people know their neighbors and trust their communities, they feel more empowered. The strength of these relationships directly influences how people perceive their neighborhoods and their ability to create positive change.

2024 Survey Implementation

The 2024 social capital surveys, supported by United Way and conducted by Blume Community Partners and LISC Greater Cincinnati, expand upon earlier community-based surveys to cover United Way's nine-county service region. This expansion enabled United Way and its partners to measure social capital across the broader community for the first time, providing insights into residents' perceptions of their civic agency. All surveys were conducted during the summer of 2024. There were approximately 500 regional survey responses.



¹ Place Matters is an initiative focused on communities with great opportunities and assets. Lead organizations bring together partners and resources to creatively respond to community priorities, improving the quality of life in a holistic and comprehensive way. Organizations share information, convene community members and rally resources and partners to solve problems. The networks supported through Place Matters proved more important than ever as communities recovered from the coronavirus pandemic. Especially during times of economic hardship and uncertainty, these connections and the support they provide for individuals and families helps people deal with the impact of crisis.

Reporting on Lincoln Heights

In Lincoln Heights, we partnered with The Heights Movement for interactive, in-person community engagement opportunities instead of traditional surveys. Residents highlighted positive developments, including The Heights Movement activities, youth programs at The Heights Movement and St. Monica's Recreation Center, and the Jackson Street Farms improving food access. Their priorities for the future center on youth support (recreational opportunities, summer jobs, pool access and an additional YMCA) alongside concerns about policing, vacant buildings and increasing black-owned businesses. Long-time residents consistently emphasized the historical strength of community cohesion and collective care for children – values guiding our work in the area.

In addition to the regional survey, United Way collaborated with partners in three Greater Cincinnati communities to assess social capital at the local level. Surveys were conducted in Westwood (390 responses), Springdale (118 responses) and Lincoln Heights (46 in-person responses). Surveys in Lincoln Heights were completed with support from The Heights Movement. In Westwood, surveys were completed alongside a comprehensive neighborhood-planning process in partnership with Westwood Works. In Springdale, the Healing Center took the lead coordinating survey completions.

The Westwood Plan

In the summer of 2024, in addition to completing more than 300 social capital surveys, residents were also engaged in an update to the comprehensive Westwood Neighborhood Plan. It includes recommendations on housing, business district development, community engagement and pride, community and family resources and transportation. Community convenings revealed issues in Westwood United Way has seen elsewhere: barriers to educational success, financial empowerment and housing security. Recommendations include increasing the housing supply in Westwood, especially housing that is attainable for all residents, support for local schools and families and increased economic opportunities in new businesses.

United Way's 2024 Social Capital Survey found when residents reported higher levels of community connectedness, they felt more positive about their neighborhoods and more empowered to drive local change. Some key findings include:

- **45%** of residents across the region said their neighbors supported and helped each other "frequently" or "all the time."

"There are a lot of friendly and helpful people in my community."
— Survey respondent

- **26%** of respondents believed their community was improving.

"Our community is growing every day, thus bringing more jobs and affordable housing."
— Survey respondent

- **55%** of respondents across the region felt individuals had the ability to influence positive change in their community.
- In Lincoln Heights, **95%** felt individuals had the ability to influence positive change in their community.
- In Westwood, **55%** of residents reported neighbors supported and helped each other, with **47%** believing the community was getting better.
- In Springdale, **49%** felt supported, and **39%** saw improvement in their neighborhood.

SOCIAL CAPITAL ACROSS SOCIOECONOMIC DIMENSIONS: A COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

Diving deeper into social capital patterns across Westwood, Springdale and the broader region, compiled survey results revealed both expected disparities and surprising areas of community resilience². Key findings include:

- **Housing status** emerged as the strongest predictor of social capital, with homeowners significantly outperforming renters and those experiencing homelessness across four of five measures.
- **Income disparities** are most pronounced in neighbor assistance and perceived safety, indicating that those with more resources are more likely to give or receive help from neighbors.

² Lincoln Heights used a different qualitative approach while gathering data and is excluded from this portion of the analysis.

- **Educational differences** appear in only two measures, challenging assumptions about educational attainment's universal impact on community engagement.
- **Residential tenure** shows minimal impact, with newcomers integrating into community networks more quickly than expected.
- **Universal civic engagement potential** exists across all socioeconomic groups, suggesting strong foundations for community-building initiatives.

Methodology

Data were collected through online and paper surveys (June-Sept. 2024) from people aged 18 and older across the Greater Cincinnati region. Social capital was measured using five indicators: neighbor assistance, positive neighborhood change perception, positive perception of street changes, ability to influence positive change (civic efficacy) and perceived safety. Responses were normalized to a 0-1 scale (like percentages), where higher scores indicate stronger social capital. We tested for differences between groups using standard statistical methods. A difference is considered “statistically significant” when we can be confident it is likely not due to random chance ($p < 0.05$).

Results: Ordered by Statistical Significance

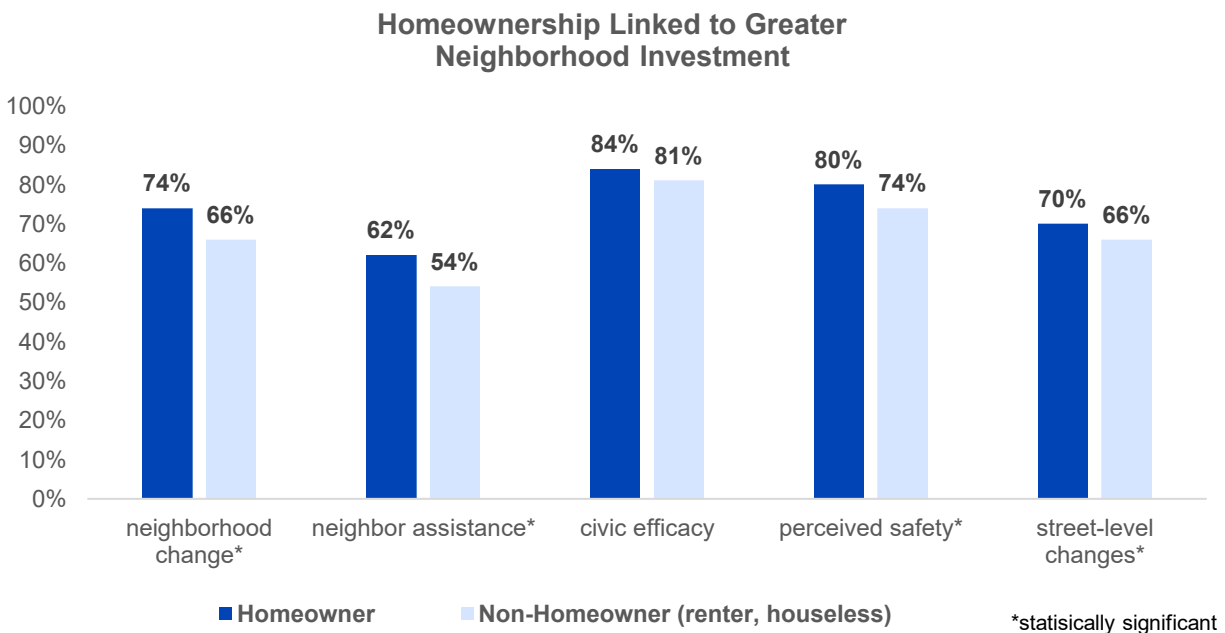
Housing Status: The Strongest Social Capital Predictor

Homeownership emerged as the strongest predictor of social capital across all other indicators. The results suggest a strong association between homeownership and higher levels of community engagement and neighborhood awareness.

Homeowners consistently report higher levels of engagement across four of the five indicators. The largest gaps appear in **perception of neighborhood change** (74% for homeowners vs. 66% for non-homeowners) and **neighbor assistance** (62% vs. 54%), suggesting homeowners may be more attuned to how their communities evolve and more connected in reciprocal relationships with neighbors. Similarly, homeowners report greater **perceived safety** (80% vs. 74%) and more awareness of **street-level changes** (70% vs. 66%), reinforcing the idea stable housing increases investment in local conditions and relationships.

Interestingly, **civic efficacy** (the perceived ability to influence positive change in one's community) was the only indicator not showing a statistically-significant difference between homeowners (84%) and non-homeowners (81%). This suggests despite disparities in neighborhood engagement, residents across housing types may feel similarly empowered to make a difference in their community. This finding points to an important strength within non-homeowning populations that can be leveraged through inclusive civic engagement strategies.

Overall, the data reinforces **housing stability's critical role in fostering social capital**. It also highlights that meaningful participation and civic potential are not limited to homeowners. Bridging the gap in community connection may require efforts that extend the benefits of stability and support to renters and those experiencing housing insecurity.



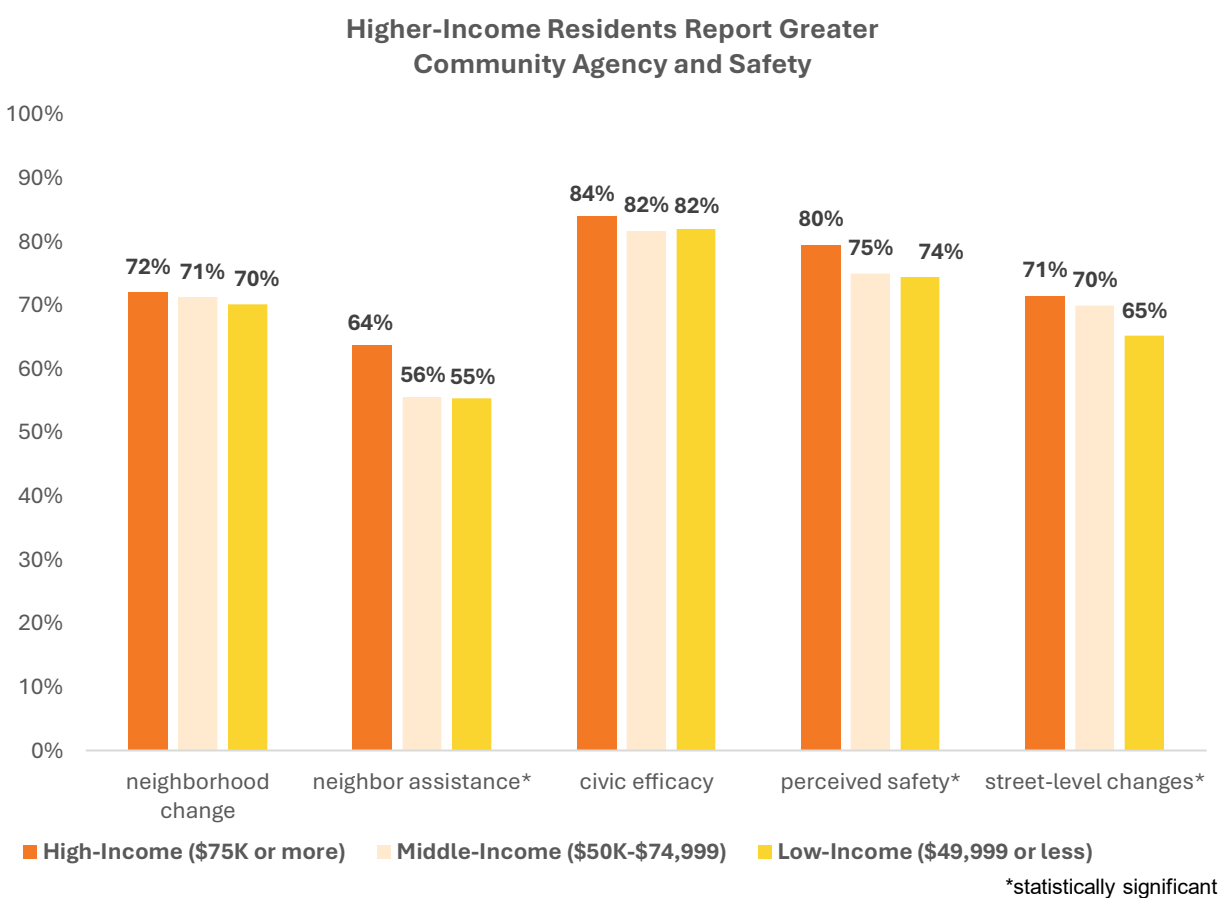
Income Levels: Mixed Patterns of Social Capital Advantage

Income creates significant disparities in some areas while showing surprising equity in others, revealing nuanced patterns challenging assumptions about universal socioeconomic advantages. The data is broken down into three income tiers: high income (\$75K or more), middle income (\$50K–\$74,999) and low income (\$49,999 or less). While not all differences were statistically significant, several key findings highlight how income can influence access to social capital.

The **neighbor assistance** measure revealed a statistically significant difference between high-income residents (64%) and both middle and low-income groups (both around 55%), indicating those with more resources are more likely to give or receive help from neighbors. Similarly, **perceived safety** was significantly higher among high-income residents (80%) compared to middle- and low-income residents (both around 75%), likely reflecting disparities in neighborhood conditions and safety infrastructure. Finally, **street-level change perceptions** showed a notable gap between low-income residents (65%) and both higher income groups (around 71%), suggesting those with fewer resources may feel more disconnected from - or possibly more vulnerable to - local, immediate neighborhood changes.

Two indicators - **neighborhood change** and **civic efficacy** - show very similar results across income groups and were found to be statistically insignificant. This suggests residents, regardless of income, tend to perceive neighborhood changes similarly and feel comparably empowered to influence positive change in their community. These findings point to encouraging levels of shared civic potential across economic lines.

These findings underscore that while some elements of social capital are widely shared, others, particularly related to social support and safety are still shaped by economic advantage. Addressing these disparities requires both strengthening local safety and support networks for lower-income residents and amplifying inclusive civic engagement already present across income groups.



Educational Attainment: Selective Advantages

Education shows the most limited impact on social capital, with significant differences appearing in only two of five measures. This challenges assumptions about higher education's universal community benefits. Social capital is compared across three educational attainment brackets: upper (bachelor's or advanced degree), middle (associate degree or some college) and lower (high school diploma or less). While

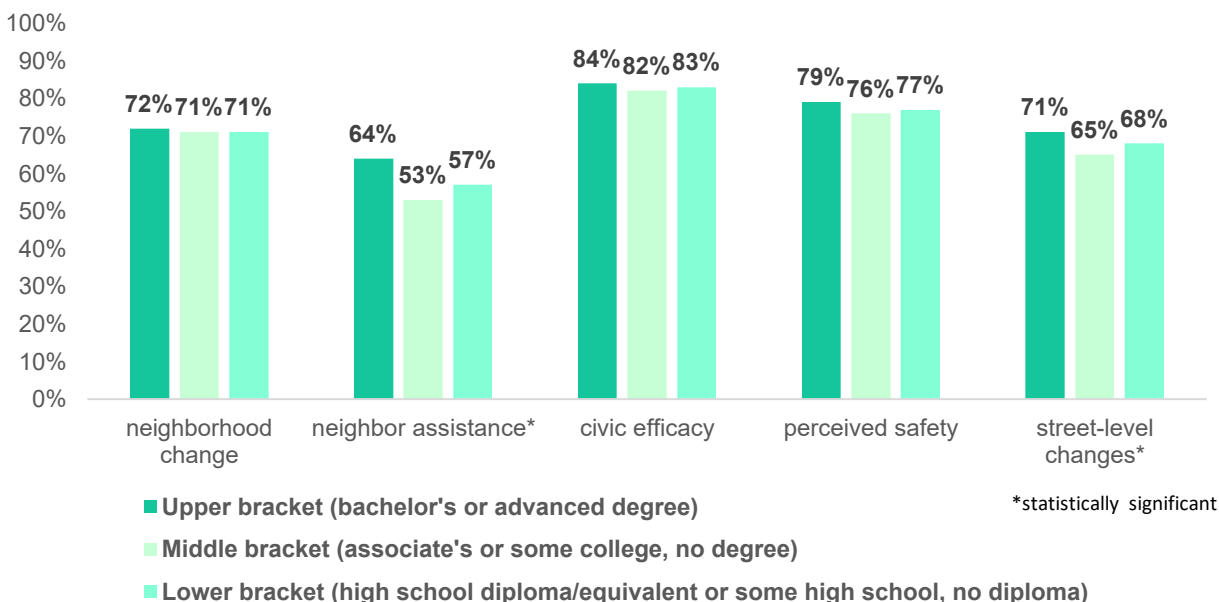
some indicators show consistent scores across education levels, others reflect meaningful gaps tied to educational attainment.

Only two indicators reveal clear disparities. **Neighbor assistance** is notably higher among residents in the upper educational bracket (64%) compared to those in the middle and lower brackets (around 54%), suggesting those with more formal education may have stronger or more reliable local support networks. Similarly, **perception of street-level changes** shows a meaningful gap, with higher-educated residents (71%) more likely to notice or be attuned to changes in their immediate surroundings compared to lower-educated residents (around 66%).

Three indicators — **neighborhood change**, **perceived safety** and **civic efficacy** — show relatively uniform scores across all groups and were found to be statistically insignificant. This suggests that residents, regardless of education level, perceive neighborhood changes similarly, feel equally safe in their communities and maintain a strong sense of civic efficacy. These results are encouraging, as they indicate foundational attitudes about neighborhood and civic life may be broadly shared across educational backgrounds.

While many aspects of social capital appear to transcend educational differences, certain forms of community engagement — particularly those involving mutual aid and hyperlocal awareness — seem more pronounced among residents with higher levels of education. These findings highlight the importance of supporting community-building strategies across all education levels while recognizing the strengths that more educated residents may bring to neighborhood engagement.

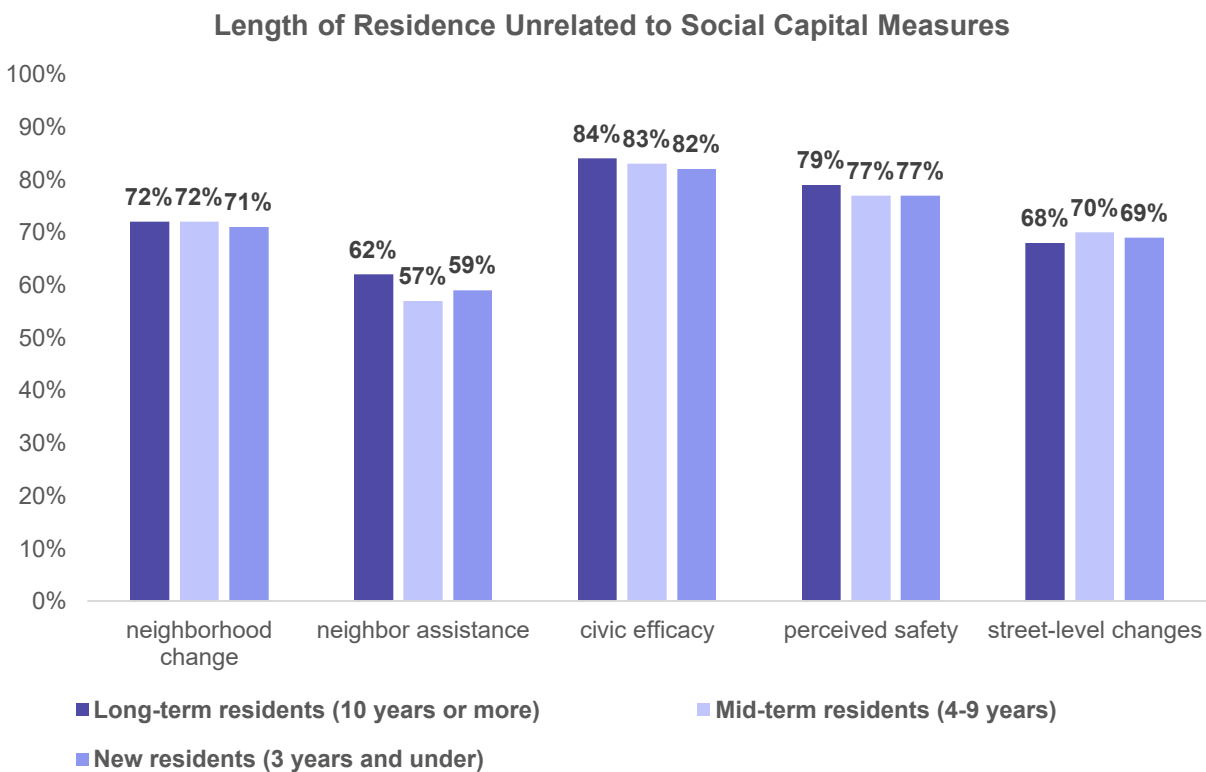
More Education Linked to Greater Civic Participation



Social Capital Consistent Across Resident Tenure

Contrary to expectations, the length of community residence shows the least impact on social capital, with no statistically significant differences across any measure. The three tenure groups include long-term residents (10 years or more), mid-term residents (4-9 years) and new residents (3 years or less). Civic efficacy consistently showed the highest levels of engagement across all groups, ranging from 82-84%, while neighbor assistance is the lowest, ranging from 59-62%. Long-term residents tend to report slightly higher engagement overall, but the differences across groups are relatively minor — all under 5 percentage points.

The findings suggest that regardless of how long people have lived in a neighborhood, their levels of involvement in community-related issues are generally similar. This implies other factors — such as neighborhood culture, leadership or local programs — may play a more significant role in shaping community engagement than length of residency.



Summary

This analysis reveals both predictable patterns and surprising areas of resilience within the community. While housing status and income create significant disparities in practical support networks and perceived safety, the universal distribution of civic efficacy across all socioeconomic groups represents community strength. The minimal impact of residential tenure and selective influence of educational attainment challenge traditional assumptions about social capital development, suggesting effective community-building requires nuanced approaches addressing specific barriers while leveraging existing civic engagement potential. Rather than assuming higher socioeconomic status automatically translates to greater community capacity, successful initiatives should focus on bridging specific gaps — particularly in mutual-aid networks — while building upon existing civic engagement potential.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

United Way believes economic mobility and well-being go beyond standard measures of economic success, and families should have the resources to make this possible today

and in the future. Where people grow up, their educational opportunities, support networks and local policies all play a role in establishing economic well-being. We identified three key focus areas that can act as levers for change: educational success, financial empowerment and housing security. We believe these pillars of economic well-being have high potential to create meaningful change. While these are not the only issues influencing outcomes, we believe they are the most urgent in our community.

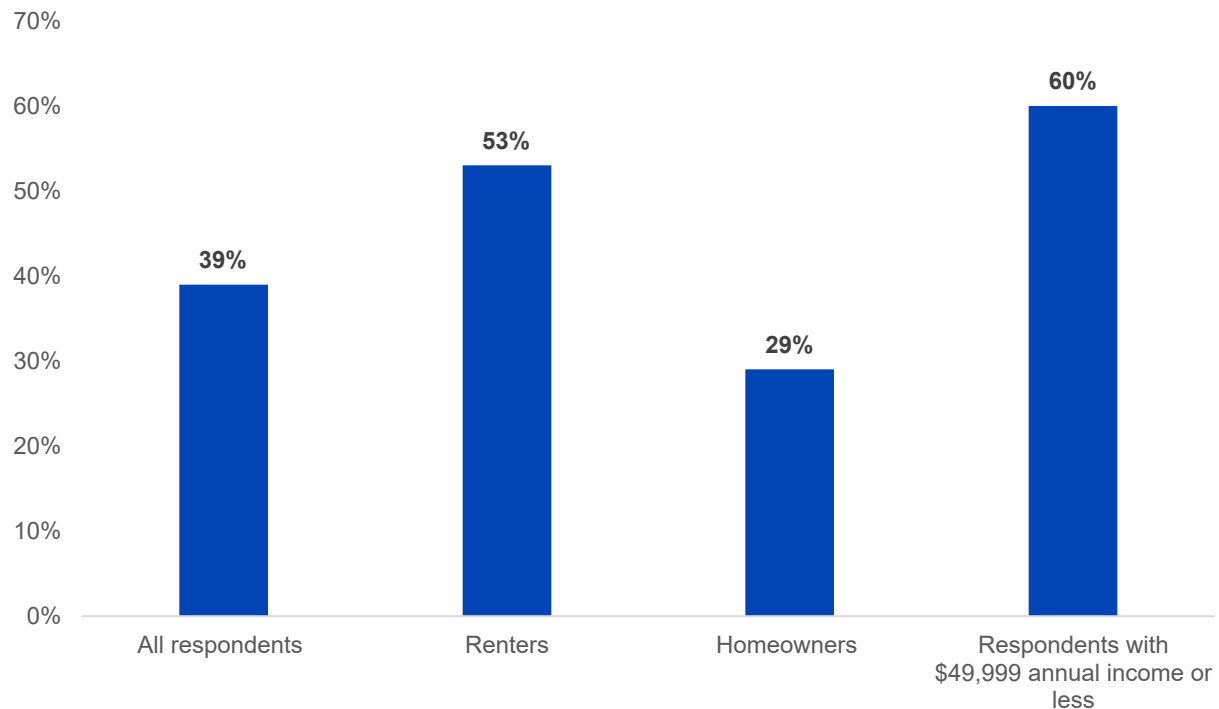
The regional survey results align with United Way's priority impact areas — educational success, financial empowerment and housing security — as such:

Top Things That Need to Change to Make Your Community Great: All Respondents

Housing	1 st	39%
Engaged citizens	2 nd	32%
Household income stability	3 rd	31%
Education	4 th tied	29%
Jobs and employment	4 th tied	29%

- **39%** of all respondents identified **housing** as the most pressing community issue, however, **60%** of respondents with an annual income of \$49,999 or less prioritized housing.
- Education and jobs and employment also ranked among the top five community challenges across all respondents (**29%**).
- Housing and financial stability emerged as significant concerns across demographics, regardless of income level or homeownership status. Additionally, citizen engagement ranked as the top issue for homeowners (**39%**) and residents of Northern Kentucky (**39%**) and Clermont and Brown counties in Ohio (**35%**), whereas it ranked fourth in Dearborn and Ohio counties in Indiana (**23%**). All respondents also highlighted the importance of community involvement, with **32%** identifying greater citizen engagement as a critical community need.

Housing as a priority community concern



Top Three Financial Issues Facing Your Family: All Respondents

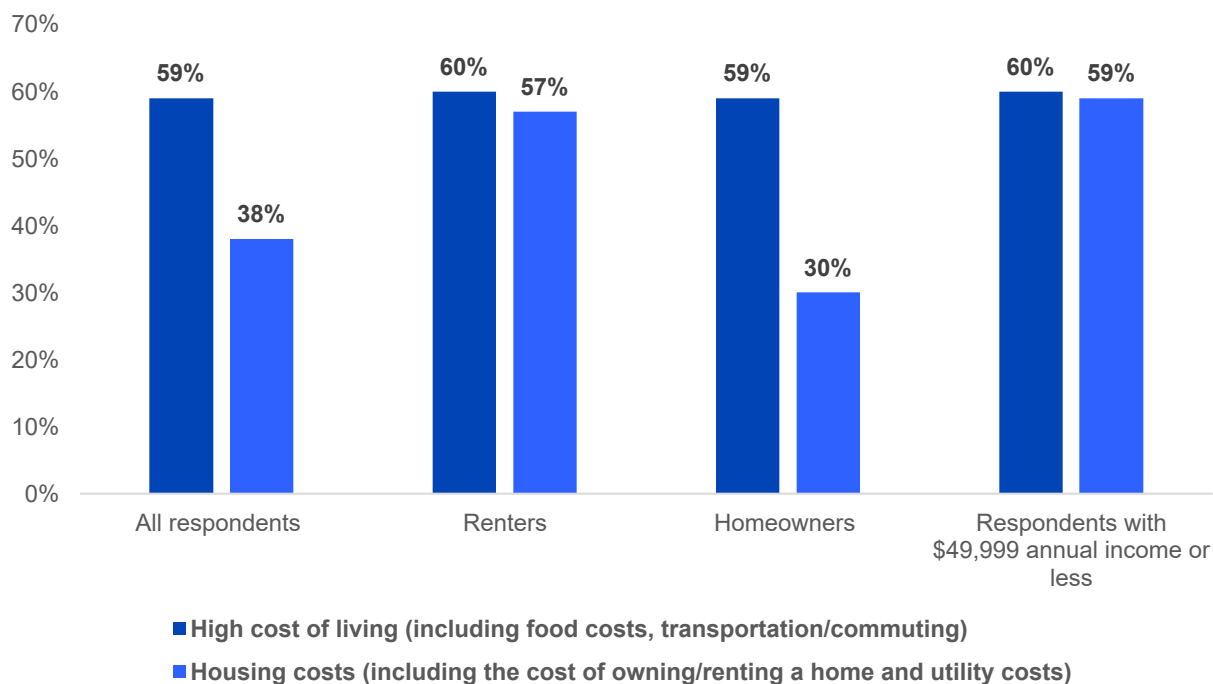
High cost of living - including food costs, transportation/commuting costs including gasoline, etc.	1 st	59%
Housing Costs - including the cost of owning/renting a home and utility costs including gas and electricity.	2 nd	38%
Taxes – including property, income and sales taxes.	3 rd	34%
Lack of money/low wages	4 th	27%
Health care costs - including health insurance.	5 th	26%

- **High cost of living** emerged as the dominant financial concern across demographics, with **59%** of all respondents and homeowners identifying it as their top financial challenge. This concern was even more pronounced among

under-resourced populations, with **60%** of renters and lower-income households (annual income less than \$50,000) prioritizing the same issue.

- **Housing costs** ranked as the second most significant financial concern overall, affecting **38%** of all respondents. The impact varies dramatically by homeownership and economic status: while **30%** of homeowners cited this issue, it was a critical concern for **59%** of lower-income households (earning **less than** \$50,000 annually) and **57%** of renters — nearly double the rate of the general population.

Top Two Financial Issues Impacting Families



Financial Challenges

Financial instability remains a significant barrier to community well-being across the region:

- **60%** of all respondents reported struggling with high costs of living — including food costs, transportation/commuting costs, including gasoline, etc.
- Nearly **40%** cited housing costs, including the cost of owning/renting a home and utility costs including gas and electricity, as a major issue.
- Among renters and those earning less than \$50,000 annually, **more than 60%** pointed to housing costs as a struggle.

Community Bright Spots

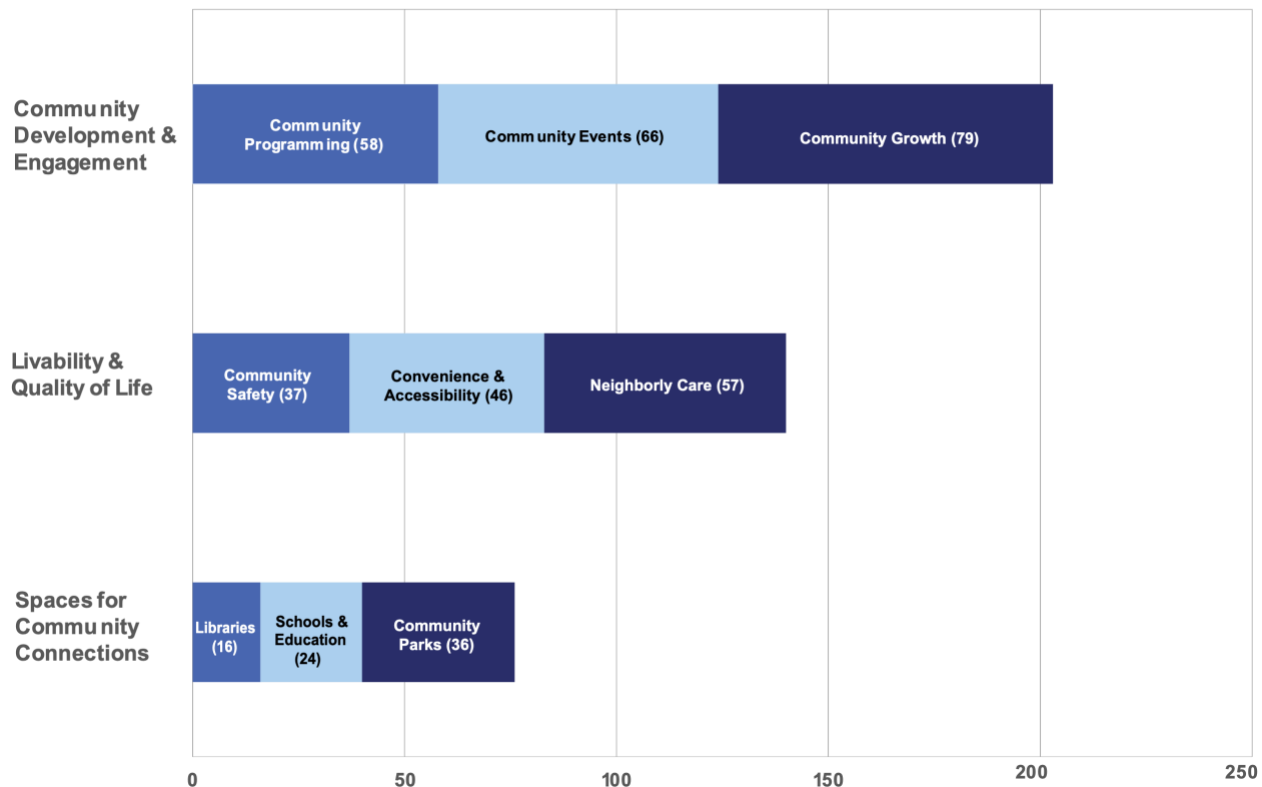
Those surveyed provided rich insight into their community's strengths. Through open-ended responses to the question "What is the best thing going on in your community?" residents shared their perspectives on what's working well, revealing a tapestry of community life that spans from physical infrastructure to social connections.

What Residents Value Most

When asked about the best aspects of their community, residents' responses clustered around several key sub-themes:

Category	# of Mentions:
Community Growth	79
Community Events	66
Community Programming	58
Neighborhood Care	57
Convenience and Accessibility	46
Community Safety	37
Community Parks	36
Business, Shopping and Community Support	26
Schools and Education	24
Libraries and Community Resources	16
Neighborhood Beautification	12
Arts and Culture	11
Community Tranquility	11
Faith Community	10

Community Bright Spots: Overarching Themes



These responses paint a picture of a community that takes pride in its natural amenities, values its strong social bonds and actively engages in development initiatives. The following analysis explores the key themes that emerged, offering valuable insights into the area's social capital and highlighting opportunities to build upon existing strengths.

Key Themes in Community Strengths

Community Development and Engagement

The community is experiencing significant growth and revitalization, marked by new housing, businesses and infrastructure improvements. Downtown areas are being transformed with a focus on inclusivity and diversity, supported by strong investments in schools, transportation and public spaces.

"Community events and beautification projects along with ArtWorks murals being painted in different areas."

— Survey respondent

Local leaders, businesses and civic groups are collaborating on property improvements and strategic development, addressing challenges through community planning and cross-sector partnerships. The community also offers robust support systems, including affordable housing, social services and volunteer-driven initiatives like food banks and community gardens.

Community events and activities — festivals, farmers' markets and holiday celebrations — play a vital role in enhancing social connections. These events, held in public spaces like parks and community centers, bring people together and create a strong sense of community pride.

Spaces for Community Connections

Residents appreciate the variety of spaces that facilitate connection, engagement and enrichment. Community parks emerged as a cornerstone of social connection, with residents consistently highlighting these spaces as vital community assets. Their natural beauty and accessibility make them essential gathering places that support recreation, strengthen community bonds and promote environmental sustainability.

Churches play an important role in worship, support and outreach, strengthening faith and unity. The arts and cultural scenes contribute to creativity and entertainment, making the community more dynamic. Libraries serve as key hubs for learning and engagement through accessible programs and resources.

"The community has become more inclusive and welcoming."

— Survey respondent

Strong schools and educational institutions are a source of pride, fostering youth development and community involvement. Collectively, these elements enhance social capital and community well-being.

Livability and Quality of Life

Residents value the convenience, accessibility and well-connected nature of their community. The area's walkability and proximity to essential services — grocery stores, schools, health care, parks and public transportation — enhance daily life and promote connection.

The peaceful and tranquil nature of the community is highly valued, with many residents describing their neighborhoods as calm, rural and tight-knit. Safety is a top priority, with

residents feeling secure thanks to lower crime rates, neighborhood watch programs and visible police presence.

"It has a true sense of community. Neighbors look out for one another; there is support for the local schools; and a commitment to children and youth."
— Survey respondent

A key sub-theme is the sense of neighborly care, with residents actively supporting one another through friendly interactions, collaboration and participation in community events. This spirit of mutual assistance and shared values strengthens the community's social fabric, making it a place where people feel connected, valued and supported.

Efforts to maintain clean, beautiful neighborhoods through public art projects, litter reduction and park and home upkeep are appreciated, creating a visually pleasing and environmentally-conscious atmosphere.

A Call to Action: Strengthening Social Capital for a Brighter Future

Research on rising isolation and mental health struggles underscores the urgent need to invest in social capital. The findings confirm that communities, where residents feel connected, experience improved outcomes in education, financial stability and housing security. To build on this momentum, United Way commits to:

i. Expanding Place-Based Investments

To create thriving communities, investments must go beyond physical infrastructure and support the social and civic fabric that binds neighborhoods together. This requires:

- Supporting organizations that build social and civic networks. By investing in local organizations that build connections, providing leadership training and creating opportunities for civic engagement, we strengthen the networks that enhance community resilience and collective action.
- Strengthening relationships between residents and the places where they live and work. Programs that encourage local pride, engagement and participation — such as neighborhood improvement initiatives, cultural events and community-driven placemaking efforts — help reinforce the bond between individuals and

their environments. These efforts make communities more vibrant, inclusive and sustainable.

ii. Fostering Collective Impact

Addressing complex social challenges requires a coordinated effort among key stakeholders, ensuring initiatives are aligned and mutually-reinforcing. This means:

- Encouraging collaboration among philanthropy, service providers and local organizations. Creating structured partnerships allows organizations to share resources, align goals and work more effectively toward common objectives. Cross-sector collaboration leads to innovative solutions and a more significant, lasting impact.
- Reinforcing the efforts of communities to work toward positive change. Providing communities with the tools, knowledge and resources necessary to implement change ensures efforts are sustainable. Funding capacity-building initiatives and recognizing community-driven solutions helps amplify grassroots efforts and create systemic change.
- Building a network of partnerships and strengthening a collaborative ecosystem to drive longer-term change in the community. Strive to achieve results for our community through deliberate and sustainable changes in systems so more families can thrive.

iii. Empowering Community Voices

Communities thrive when residents are active participants in shaping their future. To ensure equitable development, organizations must:

- Listen to and work alongside the people they serve. Establishing inclusive decision-making processes that incorporate diverse perspectives forges trust and accountability. Community advisory boards, participatory budgeting and feedback mechanisms ensure resident voices shape policies and programs.
- Support resident-led solutions that address community needs. Providing direct support, such as funding, technical assistance and mentorship, to resident-driven projects allows for more effective, culturally-relevant solutions. When residents lead, solutions are more sustainable and responsive to real challenges.

iv. Integrating Social Capital into Regional Development

Social capital — the relationships, trust and networks within a community — is a critical factor in regional development. To integrate it effectively, stakeholders must:

- Encourage partners to incorporate social capital metrics into their work. Measuring trust, engagement and community cohesion alongside economic and infrastructure indicators provides a more comprehensive understanding of development success. Policies and funding models should prioritize investments in activities that build social capital.
- Recognize that communities with strong social fabrics are better positioned to thrive. Strengthening social connections spurs resilience, economic mobility and overall well-being. Investing in programs that promote mentorship, cross-sector partnerships and community building leads to more stable and prosperous regions.

CONCLUSION

Building social capital is essential for cultivating vibrant, resilient communities where people feel connected and empowered. By investing in relationships, fostering collaboration and strengthening community networks, we can create places where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their goals. With funding landscapes becoming increasingly complex and unpredictable, mobilizing local capacity has never been more critical. Strengthening networks of individuals and organizations that can align resources, drive change and act independently will be critical to navigating these challenges. The time to act is now. Together, we can build a stronger, more connected and adaptable Greater Cincinnati region.

PARTNERS & COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

- Blume Community Partners
- Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC)
- The Healing Center
- The Heights Movement
- Westwood Works
- Brooke Thurman, Springdale resident
- Kelly Hibbett, Westwood resident
- Syretha Brown, Lincoln Heights resident

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2024 Social Capital Survey

Overview

United Way of Greater Cincinnati is conducting this survey to better understand the priorities of people who live and work in our service area and the perceptions of how the community has changed over time.

Please complete this survey if you live, work, or own a business in our 9 County service area including:

- Hamilton, Brown, and Clermont counties in Ohio
- Boone, Campbell, Grant, and Kenton counties in Northern Kentucky
- Dearborn and Ohio counties in Southeast Indiana

In appreciation of your time and sharing your voice, you will be entered into a drawing to receive a \$50 gift card upon completion of the survey.

Winners will be announced at the end of each month from June-August. Please provide your email and/or phone number at the end of the survey in order to be entered into the drawing.

Instructions

The survey will take 8-10 minutes to complete. All information provided on the survey will remain confidential; personal information will be used only to determine whether the survey respondents represent the demographic makeup of the community. We appreciate your time in completing the survey! If you would prefer to complete the survey online, please visit: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/24socialcap>

The survey will be open until August 31, 2024. Please contact Emma Shirey- McNamara with any questions at emma@blumecommunitypartners.com or (513) 478-6110.

1. What is your 5- digit zip code?

2. Which best describes you? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ I am a homeowner
- ☐ I rent an apartment or a house
- ☐ I am currently homeless
- ☐ I work in the United Way of Greater Cincinnati service area
- ☐ I own a business in the United Way of Greater Cincinnati service area

3. How long have you lived in your community?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1 - 3 years
- ☐ 4 - 5 years
- ☐ 6 - 10 years
- ☐ 10 or more years

4. What is the best thing going on in your community?

5. What are the top 3 places you visit most often in your community (not including your home)?

6. Do you and any of your neighbors help each other out (getting mail, taking care of trash, watching each other's kids, mowing lawns, etc.)?

- ☐ All the time
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes (seldom)
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Don't know/ no answer

7. How safe do you feel in your community?

- ☐ Feel safe all the time
- ☐ Feel safe most of the time
- ☐ Feel safe some of the time
- ☐ Never feel safe
- ☐ Don't know/ no answer

8. All things considered, over the past 12 months would you say your neighborhood is getting better or getting worse?

- ☐ Getting better
- ☐ Staying the same
- ☐ Getting worse
- ☐ Don't know/ no answer

9. How do you get involved in your community?
(Please select all that apply.)

- ☐ Go to community events
- ☐ Attend community council meetings
- ☐ Volunteer in my community
- ☐ Attend events at my child(ren)s school
- ☐ Shop and eat at restaurants in my community
- ☐ Garden
- ☐ Walk in the neighborhood
- ☐ Participate in social gatherings or hang out with neighbors
- ☐ Other (please specify):

10. All things considered, over the past 12 months would you say your street is getting better or getting worse?

- ☐ Getting better
- ☐ Staying the same
- ☐ Getting worse
- ☐ Don't know/ no answer

11. Do you feel that individuals, including yourself, have the ability to influence positive change in your community?

- ☐ Yes, definitely
- ☐ Maybe/ to some degree
- ☐ No, not really

12. What three things do you think need the most change to make your community great? (Please select only three.)

- ☐ Neighborhood business district(s)
- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Health
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Jobs and employment
- ☐ Household income stability
- ☐ Social and supportive services
- ☐ Engaged citizens
- ☐ Neighborhood social opportunities
- ☐ Appearance
- ☐ Arts and culture
- ☐ Safety
- ☐ Local government politics
- ☐ Other (please specify):

13. Rate the following characteristics of your community on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best:

	Terrible (1)	Poor (2)	Average (3)	Good (4)	Excellent (5)
Housing conditions or quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to affordable housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to good schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities outside of school for youth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to health care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to <u>healthy</u> food	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to public transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to community centers, libraries, parks, and other community uses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to good employment opportunities in under one hour by bus or car	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. What are the top three financial problems facing your family today? (Please select only three.)

- ☐ Lack of money/low wages
- ☐ Health care costs- including health insurance.
- ☐ Too much debt/Not enough money to pay debts.
- ☐ College expenses – including student loans.
- ☐ Housing Costs- including the cost of owning/renting a home and utility costs including gas and electricity.
- ☐ Taxes – including property taxes, income tax, sales tax.
- ☐ Unemployment/Loss of job
- ☐ High cost of living - including food costs, transportation/commuting costs including gasoline, etc.
- ☐ Lack of savings- including retirement savings.
- ☐ State of the economy
- ☐ Caregiver expenses
- ☐ Childcare and/or education expenses for children
- ☐ None

15. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Community organizations keep me aware of what is going on in the community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People can depend on each other in my community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My neighborhood is a place that welcomes new people and new ideas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel safe in my community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The business district(s) in my neighborhood are welcoming and walkable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I visit my local business district(s) on a regular basis.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can access food for myself and my family in, or nearby, my community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Demographic Questions

We are interested in getting surveys from every part of the community. The following answers will be kept confidential but will help us determine if all groups in the community are represented in the survey results.

16. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

17. Which category below includes your age?

- ☐ 17 and under
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-64
- ☐ 65 and older

18. Are there children under 18 years old in your household?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

19. Are there children under 6 years old and/or expecting mothers in your household?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

20. Which best describes your race or ethnicity? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African-American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Multiple races
- ☐ Some other race (please specify)

21. Including you, how many people live in your household?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 or more

22. What is your highest level of education completed?

- ☐ Some High School, no diploma
- ☐ High School diploma or equivalent (e.g. GED)
- ☐ Some college, no degree
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Advanced degree

23. What is the total annual income of your entire household?

- ☐ \$24,999 or less
- ☐ \$25,000 to 49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 to \$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000 to \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 or more
- ☐ Don't know/ no answer

24. If you would like to be entered into the drawing to win a \$50 gift card please provide your email and/or phone number below so that we can reach you if you win!

25. If you would like to learn more about how to get involved with United Way and/or connected to community resources, please provide your email below.

Tear this page off!

Thank you for completing this survey.

To learn how United Way of Greater Cincinnati is helping our community thrive, visit www.uwgc.org.

