

Community Capacity in Marshall County West Virginia
A Report on Survey Findings
May 20, 2008

Introduction

Local citizens residing in Marshall County completed a survey designed to assess local needs for development and local perception about the level of community capacity in Marshall County. Survey responses were collected in April and May of 2008. Some questions addressed through the on-line survey were designed to get citizen input about community needs that might be addressed through local development projects. The survey also provided necessary data to measure local capacity perceived by survey respondents across seven different areas of influence (domains) that collectively define local community capacity. Further information about how the survey is designed and how survey responses are scored is provided in the appendix.

Characteristics of the Marshall County Survey Respondents

A total of 323 adults responded to the survey. Ages of respondents were generally in the range of 30 to 70 years of age. About two-thirds of the respondents were female (68.8%).

92.4% of all respondents reported they currently live in Marshall County and 66.8% currently work in the county. Respondents live throughout the county. A higher percentage of respondents live in the Moundsville (44.9%) and Glendale (22.7%) areas than in other parts of the county. Other areas of Marshall County represented by survey respondents include:

- Sherrard – 8.7% of respondents
- Benwood/McMechen – 5% of respondents
- Cameron – 2% of respondents

7.2% of the respondents do not live in Marshall County and 9% listed some other area of the county as their place of residence.

More than half (50.2%) of the survey respondents represented themselves as Concerned Citizens. Education professionals were also well represented in the survey responses (27.3%). Other respondents chose some other primary role related to community development including:

- Healthcare professional – 7.5%
- Social Services professional – 6.9%
- Local Business Owners – 4.1%
- Local Elected Officials – 2.2%
- Development professionals – 1.9%

Since the survey respondents were not chosen randomly, survey results cannot be considered to be a statistically valid representation of the entire county population. Nevertheless, given the number of responses and the diversity of those persons who did submit responses, findings from

the survey should provide valuable information for local planners and development groups in Marshall County.

Survey Findings Related to Perceived Areas of Need

Respondents were asked two questions related to specific needs within Marshall County. A notable majority of respondents indicated they thought alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD) are a problem that needs attention where they live. 78.5% indicated the ATOD issues were something that needed attention. An even higher percentage of the respondents living in the Moundsville area believe ATOD issues need attention. 88.7% of the Moundsville residents think alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs are a problem.

Survey respondents were also asked to choose what was needed most in Marshall County to improve the quality of life for local residents. A list of needs was offered and respondents were able to choose more than one response to the question, **“What we really need the most in Marshall County to improve the quality of life for local residents is?”** The percentage of respondents choosing each option provided is as follows:

- More recreational opportunities – 72.2%
- Additional educational opportunities – 46.3%
- A community center – 45.3%
- More emphasis on culture and the arts – 34.7%
- Better healthcare facilities – 33.8%
- Increased tourism – 22.2%
- Additional housing – 11.9%

30.6% of the respondents also offered other areas of need which varied considerably; however the “other need” mentioned most frequently was **more and better jobs**.

Survey Findings Related to Domains of Community Capacity

Survey results are used to identify strengths and weaknesses in local capacity as those strengths and weaknesses are perceived by local citizens responding to the survey. Responses to the statements addressed through the survey are also useful in identifying specific local issues that may need attention as additional community capacity is built within Marshall County.

The survey results can provide valuable insight into local conditions and provide a local perspective of capacity that complements other statistical indicators summarized within the Marshall County Community Profile.

Technical information about how capacity is measured from the survey results may be found in the appendix. Simply put, the perception of survey respondents related to local capacity is summarized in this report for each of the seven capacity domains by averaging all responses for

the five survey statements (variables) related to each domain. A quantitative “score” for each of the seven domains is calculated. Possible scores for each domain may range from -2 to +2 but are generally found in the -1 to +1 range. Scores close to zero or in the negative range tend to indicate that capacity needs to be built within that particular domain and a positive score indicates that the team believes there is some level of capacity present within that particular domain that can be tapped for local development. Higher scores indicate higher levels of capacity as perceived by the team members as a group.

In some cases there may be a strong consensus of opinion among the survey respondents about a particular survey statement contributing to local community capacity. In other cases there may be very little consensus about a particular survey statement. When this is the case, the level of consensus about particular issues contributing to community capacity is noted. Variations in the way survey respondents see issues in Marshall County are to be expected and they tend to reflect the different roles and experiences of survey respondents.

Domain 1: Health and Well Being of Local People

Survey respondents believe some areas contributing to this domain are strong while others are weak. The overall score for this domain is +0.045 which indicates overall capacity related to health and well being of local residents is minimal. Marshall County residents who completed a survey were generally positive about three of the five issues contributing to this domain and they see the other two issues negatively. Community safety, public education, and early childhood services are seen as strengths in the community while health and fitness and economic security (making enough money to support families) are seen as weaknesses. Respondents see safety issues in the county as a particular strength and physical fitness as a notable weakness.

These perceptions about the health and well being of local people are generally consistent with the statistical data drawn from other sources and summarized in the community profile of Marshall County.

Recommendation:

Local programs to encourage healthy lifestyles and physical fitness would likely build additional capacity in this domain.

Domain 2: Skills Knowledge and Abilities of Local People

Based on the survey responses, people in Marshall County see this domain as a component of local capacity that needs to be improved. The average score for this domain is -0.232. This score represents an overall perception that this domain is an area of weakness for the county. Further, all five statements contributing to this domain were seen somewhat negatively by survey respondents. Most people participating in the survey do not think public meetings are very accessible, they do not feel that people are willing to help in addressing community issues, and they believe the area lacks opportunities for local residents to develop new skills. There is less consensus of opinion related to whether or not local people value life-long learning, and whether

or not government decisions are made based on good information. Overall, however, survey respondents see these areas slightly negatively as well.

Recommendation:

Marshall County groups concerned with community development may want to consider ways to increase local skill building through workshops or training programs made available to local residents. The county would also benefit from strategies to (1) increase citizen engagement in local issues and (2) increase the number of people helping with local community projects.

Domain 3: Relationships and Interpersonal Communications

Relationships and Communication is a component of social capital and this is an area where survey respondents see some issues positively and others negatively. The overall score for this domain is -0.03 indicating that some areas within this domain need attention. Survey respondents believe area residents have trust in one another to do what is best for the common good and most respondents believe local citizens need to “roll up their sleeves and do it themselves” if improvements are to be made in the community. However, respondents express concern about people working well together. Responses also indicate that local people lack knowledge about who to contact when they need help from outside the community. Differing opinions were expressed, but a majority of respondents disagreed with the statement “people believe local officials generally act in the best interest of the community at large”.

Recommendation:

The general level of trust among local citizens and willingness to get involved in making things better are attributes that can contribute to local development. Strategies to increase the level of confidence in local government actions and action to build better relationships with outside resources would help build capacity in this domain.

Domain 4: Community Initiative, Responsibility and Adaptability

This domain is a second component of social capital and addresses the sense of hope in the area, involvement of people in decision making roles, and willingness to help improve the community. Based on survey responses, social capital needs to be built in Marshall County. The overall score for this domain is -0.187. Four of the five variables influencing this domain were seen negatively by survey respondents. A majority of people participating in the survey expressed a belief that local residents “look forward to the future” but there was no consensus on this statement. Other issues were seen negatively by a majority of respondents. Most survey respondents do not think many different people serve in leadership positions within the county. There also appears to be a lack of participation on local boards and there is a perception that few people volunteer their time to help with community projects. A majority also feel the county lacks a local organization that gets people to work together on community goals.

Recommendation:

Survey responses indicate a need for organizational support to mobilize people to work together and get folks on the same page related to county priorities. A local organization designed to encourage citizen engagement and mobilize support for local development may be beneficial to building social capital in Marshall County. Leadership development programs, and implementing strategies to further engage local citizens in planning and decision making to improve the area would also be beneficial.

Domain 5: Cultural Diversity and Quality of Life

Cultural diversity and quality of life is a domain where a small level of capacity is identified by survey respondents. The capacity score for this domain is +0.062. Three of the five variables contributing to this domain are viewed favorably by a consensus of respondents. A desire to preserve local heritage, spiritual values, and a positive sense of place are all seen as attributes for the area. A lack of recreational opportunities is seen as a notable deficit by survey respondents and there also appears to be a lack of opportunities for enrichment through music and the arts.

Recommendation:

The desire to preserve local heritage and strong values expressed in survey responses are strengths that should be built upon. Local development groups in the county may wish to explore recreational opportunities and cultural events further with local citizens to identify what types of programs or facilities would be used.

Domain 6: Investments in Community and Financial Resources

This domain is another area where survey respondents see some positives and some negatives for the county. The capacity score for this domain is -0.089. Responses indicate that a “good business idea” would be supported by local banks and the majority of respondents tend to believe that local facilities are modern and well equipped. There are few opportunities in the county to learn about starting a new business, however, and there was a general belief expressed by survey respondents that local businesses generally do not do well in the area.

Statistical data included in the community profile is consistent with the survey results. Marshall County is not a retail trade center and the county receives less in outside federal and state resources than the state average. There has been some growth in available jobs within the county; however new jobs may not be “good jobs” since there has been a shift from manufacturing to service sector employment.

Recommendation:

Strategies to promote entrepreneurship in the area and provide training and support to potential entrepreneurs who may wish to start a business would likely contribute to building financial capital in Marshall County. Some type of business incubator linked to programs that promote local entrepreneurs would increase the capacity currently available in the county.

Domain 7: Sustainable, Healthy Ecosystems with Multiple Community Benefits

Overall, this domain is perceived positively by survey respondents. The capacity score for this domain that addresses stores of environmental capital is +0.228. Only one of the individual variables contributing to this domain was seen negatively; however there was lack of any consensus about two of the issues that contribute to this domain. The majority does not tend to believe local industries are environmentally friendly but many survey respondents do not see this as a problem. Survey responses are also mixed as to whether or not environmental quality is “really important” to people. Respondents do indicate that local citizens believe environmental quality is an important consideration in planning and development and they also tend to believe that people “treasure their natural surroundings”.

There appears to be an overall appreciation for the environment among county residents that might provide for some degree of environmental capital to be drawn upon to support local development. Mixed opinions are expressed, however, related to the balance between environmental quality and local industry.

Recommendation:

Given the mixed opinions related to some environmental issues expressed by survey respondents, additional community discussion about this area might prove to be useful in building environmental capital and community capacity.

Summary

The scores assigned to each domain of capacity based on the survey responses are intended only as a way to describe the perceived level of one type of capacity as contrasted to another within Marshall County. By assigning a numeric score, it is easier to identify domains of capacity that are perceived by those persons completing a survey as being present in the area and also identify those domains where attention needs to be paid to building additional capacity.

Based on the survey responses, Marshall County survey respondents tend to believe some community capacity can be found in some areas of health and well being of local people (safety and education), some cultural and quality of life issues, and in local appreciation of environmental assets. Domains of community capacity that need to be further developed in the county include components of health and well being (physical fitness of area residents and economic security), skills and knowledge of local people, relationships and communication, community initiative and citizen engagement, and financial resources.

Appendix

Methodology for Analysis of Survey Responses

Marshall County residents were asked to complete a survey in order to measure beliefs held related to 35 measures of local capacity. The capacity portion of the survey is composed of a series of 35 statements. Each of the seven domains of community capacity defined by the capacity framework (see appendix B of the Community Profile) is measured by five statements contained in the survey. Survey respondents were asked to evaluate each statement based on their personal knowledge of the larger community and choose the degree to which they agree or disagree with the 35 statements using a five point Likert-type scale. Responses for each statement can range from “strongly disagree” to strongly agree”.

Individual survey responses were analyzed to produce a composite score for each of the thirty-five variables. For purposes of analysis individual responses were scored from -2 to +2. Responses were scored as follows: “a response of strongly disagree was assigned a value of -2, disagree was valued at -1, neither agree or disagree is a neutral response and received 0 value, a response of agree was valued +1, and strongly agree was assigned a value of +2. The average of the assigned values for all respondents was then used as the score for each individual statement (variable). Finally, an average score was calculated for each of the seven domains by averaging the scores of the five variables related to each domain.

The score for each domain is based on a total of five variables multiplied by the number of respondents. Domain scores can range from minus two (-2.0) if all respondents strongly disagree to plus two (+2.0) if all respondents strongly agree. For any given statement it is highly unlikely that the average response will approach either -2 or +2. In general, positive domain scores indicate capacity is present and negative scores indicate the community lacks capacity in the area defined by the domain. Higher scores are interpreted as indicative of higher levels of capacity.

The level of capacity present within the county for each domain is reflective of the opinion and knowledge about the county of those persons completing the survey. Since the survey was not administered in a way that provides for a statistically valid sampling of all county residents, survey results are not necessarily reflective of all persons residing in the county. Levels of community capacity indicated by survey results can help to inform the more objective data available about current community conditions and help identify areas where building local capacity might be beneficial to local development efforts.