

# Impacts of a Bridging Cohort Leadership Program: Network Brown County

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## Background

Network Brown County is a leadership education program that brings together groups of 15-20 Brown County residents of diverse backgrounds for nine one-day sessions. Participants meet new people, discover new places in the county, broaden their knowledge of community resources, and increase understanding of issues facing the county. To date, six annual cohorts have completed the program.



## Previous Research

Existing research suggests that leadership education produces high levels of “bonding” social capital (strong ties among people with common backgrounds), but also tends to reinforce “old boy” networks and exclude new or non-traditional



leaders (Zacharakis and Flora, 2005). The Network Brown County program was explicitly designed to engage new or young residents from diverse backgrounds and communities across the county. This study is part of a growing tradition of using the Community Capitals Framework (Flora, Flora and Fey, 2004; Emery and Flora, 2006) to measure the impacts of leadership development. The Framework is based on the idea that every community has resources. When these resources are invested to create new resources, they become *capital* (Flora, Flora and Fey, 2004: 9). For purposes of our impact study, we asked program alumni and community stakeholders to gauge the degree to which the Network Brown County program had an impact not only in terms of social capital, but also in terms of cultural, human, political, financial, built, and natural capitals.

## Intent of this Impact Evaluation

- To determine participant-identified outcome success and impact of Network Brown County using the Community Capitals Framework.
- To measure impacts using participants, as well as community stakeholders, as data sources.

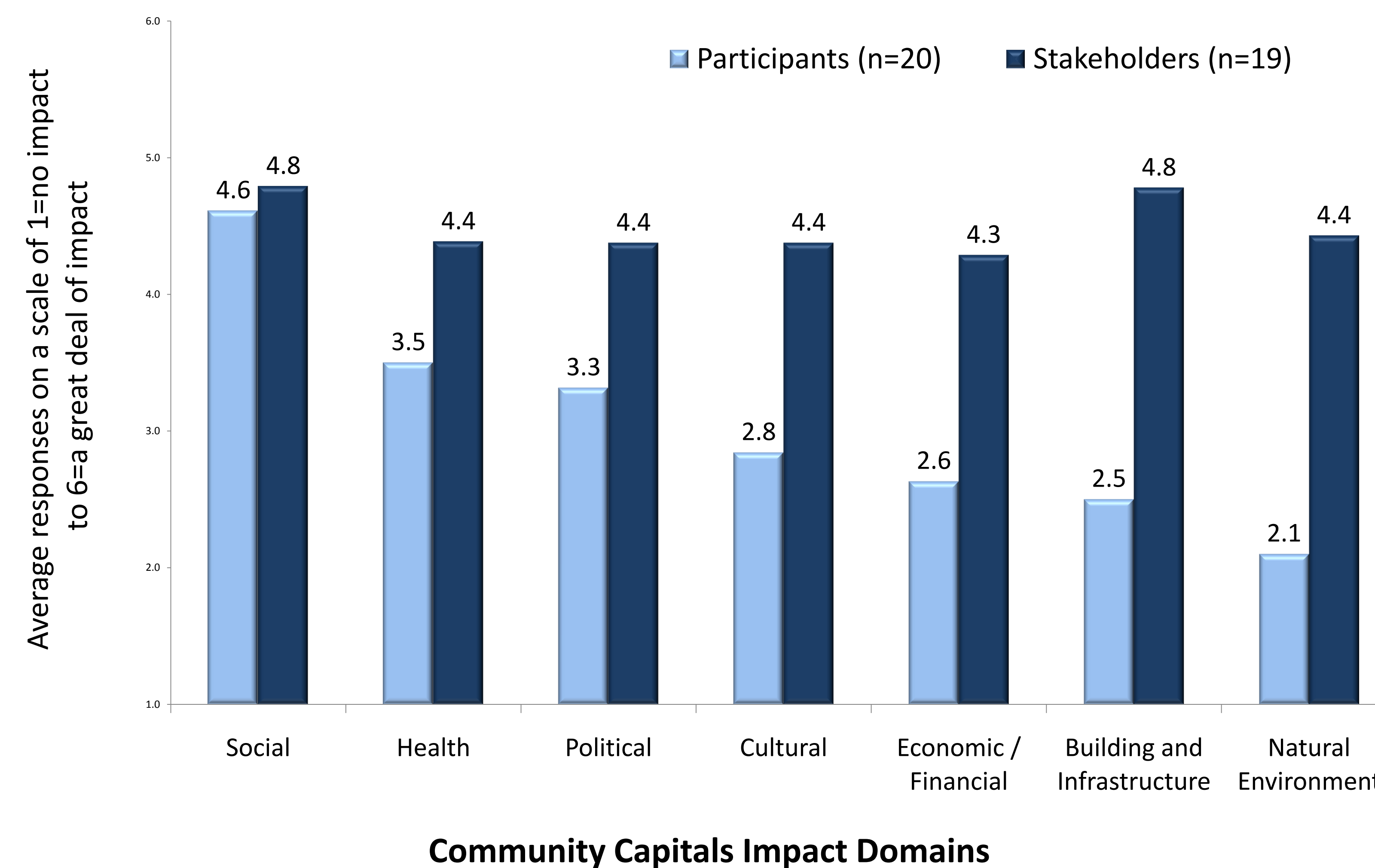
## Public Value and Private Value

“In the public and nonprofit sectors, we understand the value of our programs to *participants*. But **public value** is the value of a program to those who do not *directly* benefit from the program. **Private value** is the value of a program to direct participants.” (Kalambokidis, 2004).

## Methods

- Interviewed randomly-selected Network Brown County alumni from 4 cohort groups (n=20)
- Interviewed community stakeholders identified by alumni as people who had knowledge of the program (n=19)
- Qualitative data was supplemented with a scale (1-6) to rate the respondent’s perceived degree of change.

## Public Value Impacts



**Social:** Strengthened or expanded connections among people, groups and organizations; includes bonding networks that provide security, bridging networks that expand opportunity, and linking networks that mobilize resources.

**Political:** Greater involvement and diversity in civic activity; increased access to resources and influence to achieve community goals.

**Financial/Economic:** Preserved or expanded public and private wealth that directly or indirectly benefits the entire community.

**Cultural:** Increased access to culturally relevant goods and services in the community; increased celebration and integration of diverse worldviews in community life.

**Natural Environment:** Preserved or improved natural resources such as landscape, water, air, soil and biodiversity.

**Building and Infrastructure:** Improvement of structures and infrastructures that benefit the entire community and that enhance the tax base.

**Health and Nutrition:** Increased efforts to promote the physical and mental well-being of youth or adults in the community.

## Private Value Outcomes

- Fifty five percent of alumni interviewed believed the program changed their perception of themselves as leaders.
- Fifty percent of alumni interviewed believed the program changed the perceptions others hold about them as leaders.

## References

Emery, Mary, and Cornelia Flora. 2006. “Spiraling Up: Mapping Community Transformation with Community Capitals Framework”. *Community Development*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 19-35.

Flora, Cornelia Butler, Jan L. Flora and Susan Fey. 2004. “Rural Communities: Legacy and Change, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition”. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. pp. 9-10.

Kalambokidis, Laura. 2004. “Identifying the Public Value in Extension Programs.” *Journal of Extension* 42(2). Available at <http://www.joe.org/joe/2004april/a1.shtml>.

Zacharakis, Jeff, and Jan Flora. 2005. “Riverside: A Case Study of Social Capital and Cultural Reproduction and Their Relationship to Leadership Development”. *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol. 55 No.4, pp. 288-307.

## Selected Quotations

### Social Impacts

*Network Brown County has allowed leaders of these communities to get to know each other, to network and to talk, so that we better understand each other.*  
– Community Stakeholder

*I was able to network beyond just the [NBC] group that I was in to other people that I might contact. And one of them became kind of the chairperson of the Sleepy Eye campaign and helped me a lot.*  
– Participant



### Political Impacts

*I never would have been involved ... in United Way, or the Library Board, before. Becoming more aware of different organizations and what they do just peaks your interest. It made me realize more that I had something to contribute, too.*  
– Participant



### Financial/Economic Impacts

*During [NBC], I did get to know some... people in other cities, which helped... to fundraise over there. We wouldn't have had the success we did in the county... I wouldn't have even known who to talk to.*  
– Participant

### Cultural Impacts

*The couple of people I'm thinking of that have been through it [NBC] have been very involved in planning cultural activities, like the nativity pageant and the Riverside Days celebration.*  
– Community Stakeholder

### Health Impacts

*There were already some good county-wide efforts going on, but I think some of the connections made in the county helped kick off one new initiative related to early childhood.*  
–Community Stakeholder

## Conclusions

- Stakeholders had stronger positive opinion than participants about program impacts/public value
- Interview protocol organized around the community capitals framework teased out powerful stories
- NBC had strong impacts across the board – bridging cohorts have a big payoff in terms of public value
- NBC had weaker results in terms of private value “leadership development” goals
- Creating networks is an important strategy for success with businesses, professional organizations, in volunteer work, and for political action
- Leadership cohort programs should not only focus on leadership development skills but also be intentional to include activities which build both formal and informal networks
- Further study is needed to better understand the collective value of informal networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to assist each other and their communities