

# SOCIAL CAPITAL DATA BRIEF: BRIDGING & BONDING RELATIONSHIPS

## BACKGROUND

**Social capital** is having the networks, norms, and structures that promote upward economic mobility by increasing social stability and widening access to key resources.<sup>1</sup> In 2019, the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute partnered with Leading on Opportunity, Opportunity Insights, Foundation for the Carolinas, Communities In Schools, the YMCA of Greater Charlotte, and SHARE Charlotte, with additional funding support from the Gambrell Foundation, to conduct a new baseline measurement of social capital in Mecklenburg County. One way of measuring social capital is to measure the types of relationships that people rely on to give and receive support. These are called bridging and bonding relationships. **Bonding relationships** are characterized by strong ties among people with similar backgrounds or characteristics. **Bridging relationships** are looser ties among people from different cross-sections of society.<sup>3</sup> Both types of relationships are important. Scholars have described bonding relationships as those most often used for day-to-day sources of support, including sharing information about job opening and providing referrals. Bridging relationships can create access to opportunities beyond what is available in an individual's immediate social circle, which may create more opportunity for upward economic mobility.<sup>3-4</sup> Literature has noted that social capital is not evenly dispersed in society, and low-income individuals may disproportionately lack access to bridging relationships due to limiting factors such as the impact of poverty, neighborhood segregation, or lack of access to higher education. As a result, low income individuals may rely more heavily on bonding relationships as a source for job opportunities.<sup>4</sup>



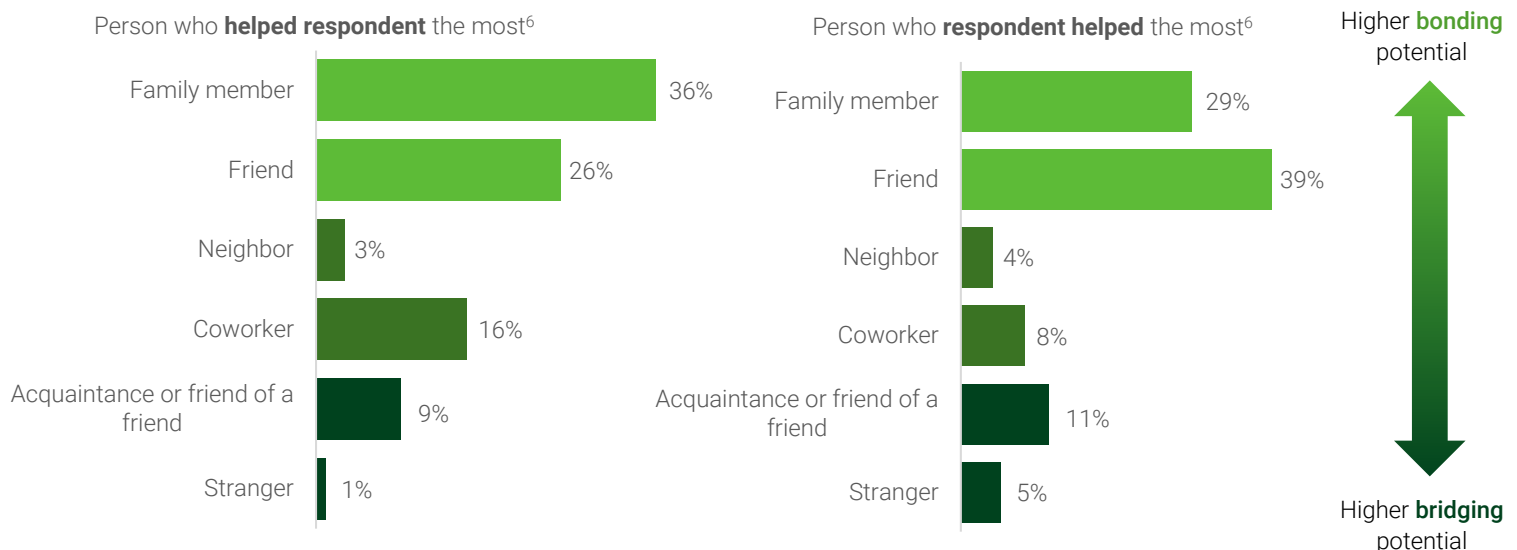
Social capital can create opportunities for upward economic mobility<sup>2</sup>

## BRIDGING AND BONDING RELATIONSHIPS

The 2019 Social Capital Survey consisted of a 400-person sample that was demographically representative of Mecklenburg County. On the survey, 272 respondents indicated that they received help (financial, non-financial, advice, or connections) in the last 12 months from outside of people in their household or paid work and 357 indicated that they had given help. Both groups were asked to identify their relationship to the person who helped them or who they helped the most. It is not possible to classify a relationship as bridging or bonding only knowing the relationship type. However, literature indicates that family and friends are more often considered bonding relationships, while acquaintances, friends of friends, and strangers are more often considered bridging relationships.<sup>5</sup> Using this information, a bridging/bonding continuum was created to reflect the bridging and bonding potential of each relationship type.

## MOST HELP COMES FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The majority of respondents received the most help from individuals with higher bonding potential such as family members (35%) or friends (26%), while a smaller percent indicated that they received the most help from relationships with higher bridging potential such as acquaintances or friends of friends (9%). This same pattern was seen when respondents were asked to indicate their relationship to the person who they helped the most. These responses suggest that most respondents exchange connections and resources with networks of people with whom they have stronger ties.

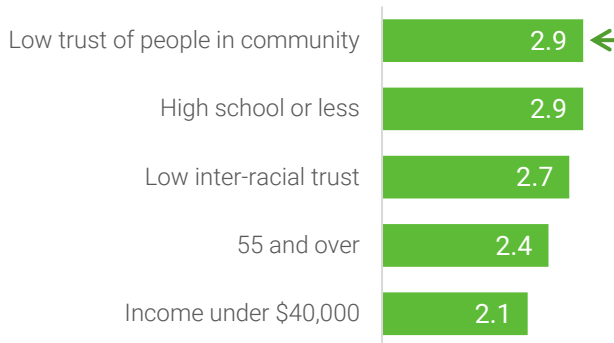


1. This is the working definition of social capital developed by the Charlotte Social Capital Research Committee.; 2. Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. (2014); 3. Putnam, 2000; 4. Abbott M & Reilly A. (2019).; 5. Patulny, R. V., & Lind Haase Svendsen, G. (2007). 6. Responses that did not fit one of the pre-defined categories were classified as "other" and included employers, employees, mentors, teachers, students, and other unspecified relationships.

## TRUST, EDUCATION, AND RELATIONSHIP TYPES

Respondents who reported having low trust of people in the community (n=37) or low inter-racial trust (i.e. level of trust of people outside of your own race/ethnicity; n=84) were more likely to rely on a family member as their most important source of support. This finding was statistically significant, regardless of the age, education level, or race/ethnicity of the respondent.<sup>7-8</sup> Those with a high school degree or less, with household income under \$40,000, and who were 55 or over were also more likely to rely on family as their most important source of support.

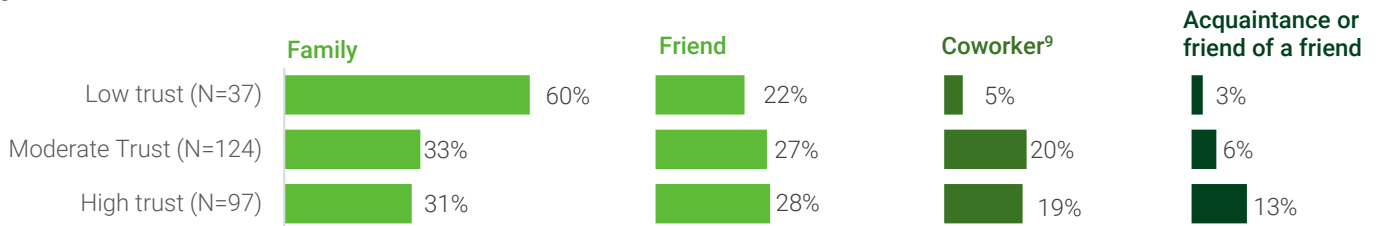
Respondents were more likely to say that a **family member** helped them the most if they reported:



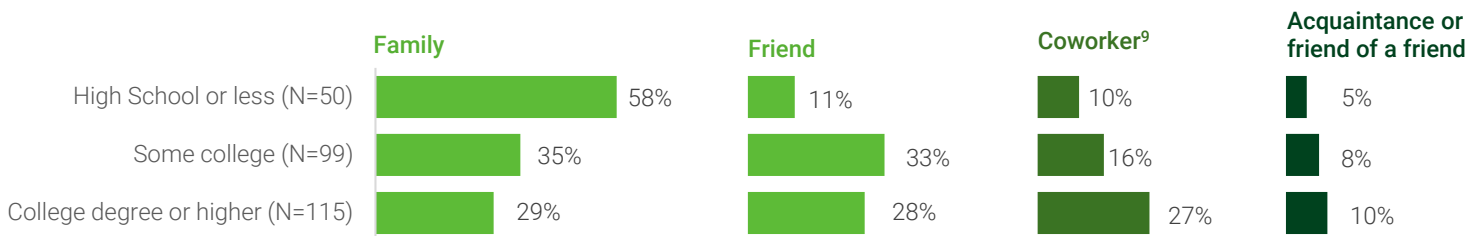
Regardless of age, education level, or race/ethnicity, respondents who reported **low trust of people in their community** were **2.9 times** more likely to say that a family member helped them the most, compared to respondents who had higher levels of trust.

The descriptive statistics below show the percent of respondents in each category who received the most help from a family member, friend, coworker, or acquaintance or friend of friend. The sample size of each group is recorded as (N=#).

60% of respondents with **low trust of people in community** received the most help from a family member, while only 31% of respondents with high trust did so.



The majority (58%) of respondents with a **high school degree or less** received the most help from a family member, compared to only 29% of respondents with a college degree or higher.



7. Response categories for trust variables were recoded so that "not at all" and "only a little" were recategorized as low trust, "some" as moderate trust, and "a lot" as high trust;

8. Regression analysis was conducted to determine if trends had statistical significance, controlling for variance caused by age, race/ ethnicity, and education; 9. To examine whether employment status accounts for differences in the percent of coworkers identified, the coworkers calculation only included respondents who were working full or part-time.

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