

“Local government and public entities work best when their citizens are knowledgeable and involved. When our leaders have informed and respectful input from citizens, they can make better decisions impacting the community.”

Ronald Ponds, Community Volunteer

The 2009 *Community Focus* report expressed concerns, based on a 2008 survey examining social capital in Springfield, about a general sense of alienation* and mistrust in institutions*, particularly governmental institutions. This general sense of alienation shows up in such things as low voter turnout and difficulty mobilizing citizens to action with traditional mass media, such as the newspaper. Results of the study suggested that area citizens trust those who are similar to them, but have few connections that allow them to bridge different groups of people. Several indicators have improved since the last *Community Focus* report and a number of creative approaches are being used to enhance citizen participation and promote bridging between groups.

The 2010 Ozarks Regional Social Capital Study capital report reveals some improvement in several areas. Compared to the original 2008 report, the current report indicates that citizens are more trusting of others (43 percent to 55 percent), believe others are fair (59 percent to 68 percent), and others are helpful (59 percent to 66 percent). Trust in local police and local news media rose substantially (86 percent to 91 percent and 66 percent to 76 percent, respectively), as did trust in local government (36 percent to 42 percent). Trust in the national government, however, fell slightly, by two percentage points. Improvements also were observed in the degree to which people feel alienated from local leaders and believe they can make a difference in their communities. It should be noted that trust is highly dependent on education and income; individuals with more education and higher incomes tend to be more trusting in institutions, including government.

Blue Ribbons

Strategies to Increase Citizen Involvement

A number of initiatives have helped increase citizen participation and provide the means to mobilize community action* at the grassroots level. First, the City of Springfield, under the leadership of the city manager, embarked on a strategic planning process to envision what the city might look like 20 years from now. This process involved numerous community groups, organizations and individuals who, for more than a year, examined 13 areas of the community including such things as arts, culture and tourism, early childhood education, and transportation. Each of these areas influences a city's quality of life. More than 234 citizen volunteers, serving on 13 planning committees and the Coordinating Committee, contributed more than 3,600 volunteer hours (as of November 2010) to this process. In addition to the group meetings held throughout the city, citizens were invited to provide their feedback electronically. This substantial involvement of area citizens likely contributed to the perception that one's individual voice could be heard.

Second, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce embarked on a diversity initiative, in part to increase Springfield's competitiveness with respect to businesses seeking to locate or relocate to the area. The area's lack of diversity and entrenched culture of poverty have been areas of concern based on an analysis done by an independent economic development consulting firm.

Recently the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, joined by other major entities in the area, has spearheaded a concerted effort to be a more welcoming community by encouraging participation in public life by diverse members of the community, and raising awareness of issues related to cultural and ethnic diversity. In addition, grassroots organizations, such as Minorities in Business, have mobilized members of the minority community to increase access to and participation in civic life.

Third, funding is currently being sought to implement a program called Study Circles, spearheaded by the Mayor and a faculty member from Missouri State University, during the next year. Study Circles involve ways in which a community's citizens can study local problems and work together to solve them. This local community mobilization effort has been implemented successfully in several communities. Once funding is obtained, facilitators from Everyday Democracy.org will help train local citizens to create and implement their own Study Circles to address issues of poverty. Study Circles provide additional ways to increase citizen participation locally and will help members of the community form bridges among groups within the community.

Volunteerism

Volunteerism again receives a blue ribbon, with the number of volunteer hours holding steady or increasing since the 2009 *Community Focus* report. Area residents consistently give their time, expertise, and resources to help their fellow citizens, which has been particularly important during the recent economic downturn in the national and local economies. The United Way's Day of Caring annually provides thousands of hours of labor to help a variety of non-profit service organizations. University students have been essential to the area's volunteer efforts, with many local university students participating in service learning and alternative spring break programs to benefit local residents.



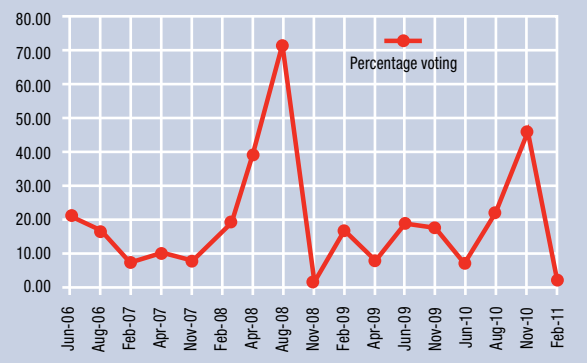
A United Way Day of Caring volunteer reads to children at a daycare facility.



High school students participate in a project to help Greene County senior citizens.

has been much lighter. The low turnout in February 2011 was affected by a heavy snowfall on Election Day that caused the election to be postponed for two weeks. Even so, voter participation is lower than is desirable.

Greene County Voter Turnout by Percentage 2006 - 2011



Source: Greene County Clerk

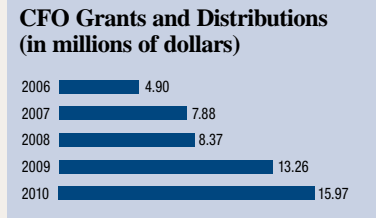
Citizen Participation Volunteer Chart, 2006-2010

Organization Name	Volunteers			Vol. Hours		
	2006	2008	2010	2006	2008	2010
St. John's Hospital	682	675	850	147,695	141,580	170,000*
CoxHealth	1,981	1,319	1,034	141,250	116,345	135,893
United Way of the Ozarks	5,482	3,004	3,315	35,395	18,024	19,890
Community Partnership of the Ozarks	7,064	10,447	6,617	26,590	40,428	37,818
Junior League of Springfield	190	235	212	19,000	29,164	30,000*
Springfield/Greene County Library			222	5,115	13,000	17,390
Springfield Conservation Nature Center		400	400	16,385	15,814	13,783
League of Women Voters of SW MO				1,645	2,534	2,500*
Retired Senior Volunteer Program of the Council of Churches of the Ozarks		1,499	1,623	247,740	190,596	181,833
Drury University				1,725	7,563	20,000*
Evangel University				10,780	9,663	7,905
Missouri State University				114,468	171,018	122,822

Source: Data Provided by Listed Organizations (*estimated hours)

Charitable Giving

The Ozarks, along with the rest of the country, has been rocked by the economic downturn of the last two years. Smaller non-profit organizations have been particularly hard hit and many struggle to survive. Despite this, charitable giving to organizations like the United Way of the Ozarks has held steady. Contributions to the Community Foundation of the Ozarks (CFO) reached all-time highs during the last two-year period. The CFO's Grantmakers' Challenge for Children concluded its five-year effort in 2010. Through a number of partnering organizations and individuals, the initiative contributed more than \$22 million locally to address issues related to child poverty. Since its inception in 1973, the CFO has made more than \$100 million in grants and distributions on behalf of its donors and partners, which has significantly helped buffer economic challenges for local non-profit organizations.



Source: Community Foundation of the Ozarks

Red Flags

Voter Turnout

Voter turnout in elections continues to be a concern, with the percent of eligible voters who actually voted ranging from a low of 2.57 percent in February 2011 to a high of 71.05 percent in the presidential election of November 2008. Voting in the Ozarks tends to be issue-driven. For example, the 2008 presidential election energized the voting population, particularly younger voters, but participation in other elections



Female Leaders in Philanthropy (FLiP) volunteers work at the Suit Yourself Boutique.

Soldiers from Fort Leonard Wood work on a Greene County senior's home.

Some 1,800 volunteers participated in the 2010 United Way's Day of Caring 2010, which kicks off with an annual breakfast.

Stratification of Participation

It was noted earlier that an individual's degree of trust is related to income and education. This is true as well regarding the degree of participation in local initiatives. Individuals with more education, higher income levels, and who live in south Springfield are more likely to participate in such efforts as the City's strategic-planning initiative. For example, people who did not finish high school are almost twice as likely not to have volunteered at any time during the past 12 months compared with college graduates (35 percent to 18 percent). Twenty-seven percent of people with a college degree had served as an officer or on a committee of a local club or organization in the past 12 months, but only 17 percent of those with less than a high school degree had exercised leadership in those ways.

This stratification of participation is of great concern because it suggests that those individuals who feel most alienated are exactly those who are less likely to be civically involved. It is critical, therefore, that we continue to seek new and creative ways - such as the Study Circles described earlier - of involving all citizens when addressing local issues.

*Indicates Emerging Issue in 2009 Community Focus Report