

# Citizen Participation

In studying citizen participation, this report will consider both the charitable involvement as well as the civic engagement of the citizens of our community. Although many components play into overall engagement, *volunteerism, charitable giving, and voter turnout are incredibly important to the structure and effectiveness of a community.* While some issues continue to be red flags in our community, *many blue ribbons of progress have emerged* as attempts to involve all citizens and create a better Springfield.

## BLUE RIBBONS

### Youth Engagement

Many organizations in the Springfield region work to engage younger individuals in the civic process. For example, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce's in.network and The Network engage college interns and young professionals in Springfield. The City of Springfield also recently established a Student Advisory Council in order to garner the engagement and opinions of young, emerging leaders in high school and college. Additionally, programs like Leadership Springfield, currently in its 29th cohort, work to create mentorship and leadership programs to encourage expanded involvement.

Efforts to encourage civic involvement by young citizens have increased in the Springfield area. Community programs connect young people with policymakers and promote volunteer activities. The Community Foundation of the Ozarks' (CFO) Youth Empowerment Project and numerous service-learning projects in the Springfield Public Schools continue to involve both students and parents in civic and school engagement and work toward decreasing a sense of alienation



Springfield Youth Empowerment Project students grant funds to the Rare Breed Youth Services.

and increasing community trust. Additionally, our universities continue to work to encourage and facilitate volunteerism.

### Community Opportunities

Opportunities for volunteerism have been blue ribbons multiple times since the 2004 Community Focus report and continue to be strong assets to our community.

The 2012 Social Capital and Civic Participation in the Ozarks study notes civic participation in our region has increased over time. Local residents feel a greater sense of social capital when compared to the nation. Civic engagement is strongly tied to education, income, and age; individuals with higher education and income levels, as well as more advanced age, feel the most engaged. This social capital study also found individuals who believe community leaders care, and who share a higher level of trust, are individuals with a greater degree of civic engagement. More trusting individuals also were more likely to have voted in a recent election, attended a club or public meeting, served on a committee, or taken action for reform.

While this data is not surprising, it provides Springfield with the challenge of increasing opportunities for voluntary association in an effort to increase community trust and involvement by those who currently do not engage in civic efforts. This goal is especially difficult because Springfield struggles with its ability to bridge social capital. Specifically, while many individuals in the community feel trust for their neighbors or own networks like church communities (bonding capital), they often do not feel trustful nor do they participate in more heterogeneous social



A Springfield Public Schools reading buddy volunteer reads with a student.

groups (bridging capital). Therefore, a struggle exists with the involvement of new and emerging leaders.

### Community Grantmaking Increasing

As noted in previous Community Focus reports, the giving nature of our community remains strong. Giving USA recently conducted a study on the charitable giving landscape in America, which compared charitable giving geographically. Missouri, when comparing charitable giving as percentage of income statewide, ranked 24th out of 50 states with an average of 4.4 percent of family income spent charitably. Springfield, however, has a higher-than-average percentage of charitable giving, making it among the most charitable communities in the state of Missouri.

Charitable involvement also continues to increase each year. The CFO received an organizational record number of gifts and made a record number of grants in 2012 with \$40 million and \$20.2 million, respectively. Additionally, the most recent Columbus Survey places the CFO as the 9th busiest community foundation in the nation with more than 14,000 charitable gifts in the 2012 fiscal year. This is a strong reflection of our citizens' prioritization of giving despite low wealth overall.

**“Philanthropic participation allows our sorority to give back to a community that has given so much to us. We learn about others and ourselves through our volunteer and fundraising efforts. It prepares us, in many ways, for life after graduation and gives us a realistic view of issues that we will face in other communities that we will call home.”**

—Michala Boehm, Vice President of Philanthropic Services, Sigma Kappa - Delta Upsilon Chapter, Missouri State University

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION BY VOLUNTEER HOURS

ORGANIZATION	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
Mercy Health	138,477	147,695	141,580	170,000	174,000
CoxHealth	129,029	141,250	116,345	135,893	152,716
United Way of the Ozarks	28,840	35,395	18,024	19,890	24,017
Community Partnership of the Ozarks	N/A	26,590	40,428	37,818	29,056
Junior League of Springfield	11,000	19,000	29,164	30,000	36,464
Springfield-Greene County Library	4,632	5,115	13,000	17,390	14,670
Friends of the Springfield-Greene County Library	N/A	4,727	8,222	12,451	13,572
Springfield Conservation Nature Center	15,441	16,385	15,814	13,783	13,269
League of Women Voters of Southwest Missouri	1,500	1,645	2,534	2,500	2,500
Retired Senior Volunteer Program of the Council of Churches	262,820	247,740	190,596	181,833	166,815
Springfield Public Schools (students and community)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	34,174
Springfield Public Schools (reading and lunch buddies)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6,626
Drury University	N/A	1,725	7,563	9,000	20,886
Evangel University	N/A	10,780	9,663	7,905	N/A
Missouri State University	N/A	114,468	171,018	106,321	420,325*

Source: Data provided by listed organizations

\*Includes the addition of fraternity and sorority volunteerism



Volunteers participate in the 2012 United Way Day of Caring.

Similarly, increased community support was evident at the United Way of the Ozarks (UWO) in 2012. At its annual campaign celebration, the UWO reported raising \$3,883,928 in 2012, representing a 14.7 percent increase over 2011. This exemplifies our community's desire to step up and begin to make positive changes when made aware of organizational needs.

## RED FLAGS

### Voter Turnout Remains Issue Based

A consistent red flag in previous Community Focus reports, voter turnout in Springfield continues to follow the national trend. Voters in the Springfield-Greene County area appear

### GREENE COUNTY VOTER TURNOUT, 2011-2012



Source: Greene County Clerk

to be engaged in voting on a national or state-wide level, but local issues lack significant citizen voter participation. During the November 2012 presidential general election, voter turnout was the highest since the previous presidential election while local elections received little citizen involvement.

When comparing costs of holding an election with voter turnout numbers, the cost per voter can be staggering. For example, the April 2012 municipal election, which involved Springfield and public school issues, cost nearly \$9 per voter. The most costly election, based on per voter costs, was the June 2012 smoking ban re-vote, which cost \$54.95 per voter to operate. These elections also exemplify how voter turnout is not reflective of community discussion, given how extensively the smoking ban re-vote was discussed in various media.

### Citizen Involvement Remains Low

Though strong community opportunities exist, many times involvement remains low. The Neighbor for Neighbor program, conducted in the Robberson neighborhood, is an example of the tension between available opportunities and low participation. As discussed in the 2011 Community Focus report, Neighbor for Neighbor was established to assist the Robberson community in identifying and overcoming economic hardships. Although participation was initially strong, it dwindled significantly as the program continued. The project is in its second iteration and is working to increase involvement. As an ongoing

look into the value of civic engagement's impact on participant civic trust, the program continues to try to develop bridging capital in the community.

Education also can play a significant role in overcoming this red flag. The City of Springfield recently managed a Sanitary Sewer Overflow Control Program in its central and west neighborhoods, an area of the community known for struggling to bridge social capital and low citizen involvement. The program had a 95 percent participation rate, however, in voluntary plumbing evaluations (1,522 of 1,656 individuals, respectively). This success was due in part to the City's admirable efforts to educate and assist community members with understanding the value and importance of the program before beginning the project. This project affirms the important role education and community awareness will play in future attempts to create quality bridging social capital.

Additionally, our community must continue to try to create greater diversity in leadership. In the Social Capital Survey, Springfield adults under the age of 50 were asked about the importance of diversity in Springfield. Many noted living in a diverse community is very important to them. Diversity in community leadership is low, however, and could be a significant deterrent to adding new faces and ideas that could positively impact our community. Efforts to increase diversity could significantly improve citizen involvement as well as increase the number of new faces serving our community on public boards, councils, and committees.