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## Civic Engagement and Voluntarism

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### Description

Most human service organizations rely heavily on charitable contributions and volunteer hours to accomplish their work. Recent studies (United Way of America, 2000) have looked at ways to measure a community's "state of caring" through factors like voluntarism, charitable giving and active participation in civic activities. Questions about volunteering, neighborhoods and community strength were included in the Household Survey administered by telephone to 307 Monroe County residents.

In addition, the Community Strengths survey measured several indicators of civic engagement and individuals' perceptions about the community's overall willingness to work together for a common goal. Key informants were asked to respond to ten different statements about their neighborhood and community as a whole. Households completing the telephone survey were asked to respond to three corresponding statements about their neighborhoods. Persons participating in one of the four client interview groups were asked the same volunteering and neighborhood questions.

Working together as a community will require integrating those of different cultures, including the growing Spanish-speaking population. There are many resources that can work collaboratively toward mutual goals in human services, including the faith-based community and Indiana University. Both currently provide human services to some of their stakeholders and provide referrals to community agencies.

### Monroe County Fast Facts

Monroe County is 90.8% white, 3.4% Asian, 3.0% African American or Black, and 1.9% Hispanic. *For additional population statistics, please see the Supplement.*

### Key Findings

Key Informants and household participants were asked to complete items to assess indicators of community strength. The results of the Community Strengths Survey for the key informants follows:

## Key Informants -- Community Strengths Survey Results

	SA*	A	SD	D
1. Your community is one where leaders from business, labor, government, education, faith, neighborhood, non-profit and other sectors come together and work productively to address critical community issues.	25%	53%	17%	5%
2. Your community is one that actively promotes positive relations among people from all races, genders, ages and cultures	36%	58%	5%	1%
3. Your community is one where people and organizations from throughout the county get together to address mutual concerns.	8%	66%	24%	2%
4. Your community is one where different faith-based groups come together to address pressing social concerns.	10%	53%	30%	7%
5. Your community is one that actively supports and strengthens connections between families, neighborhoods, and the whole community.	18%	55%	27%	0%
6. Your community is one that encourages active participation in the political process from all races, genders, ages and cultures.	17%	51%	30%	2%
7. Your community is one in which there exists a strong sense of mutual respect among leaders from all sectors of the community.	12%	48%	34%	6%
8. Your community is one in which communication among people and organizations is conducted in a civil and respectful manner.	22%	52%	22%	4%
9. It is important for a community to have a vision and a set of common goals.	78%	21%	1%	0%
10. Our community has a vision and a set of common goals.	7%	44%	38%	11%

\* SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

While 99% of the respondents believe it is important for a community to have a vision and set of common goals, only 51% believe that Monroe County has one. The community scored well on questions related to promoting good relations among all citizens, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or culture, and encouraging participation in the political process. Lower scores are found on measures of how well individuals and various community groups work cooperatively on community concerns. About 40% of those responding believe that community leaders do not exhibit mutual respect for each other.

## Household Telephone Survey Results–Community Strengths

Of the individuals who completed the Household Survey, 69% considered themselves to be part of a neighborhood, 29% did not, and 2% didn't know. Three of the questions on the telephone survey asked respondents questions about the strength of their neighborhoods. They were asked:

In the past year, have people who live near you come together to work on a common problem?

Yes	No	Don't Know
30%	63%	7%

How often do people who are different from one another, for example, young and old, established residents and newcomer, black and white, participate together in neighborhood activities?

Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't know
8%	39%	23%	22%	8%

How often do people who live near you watch out for each other?

Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't know
40%	39%	14%	5%	2%

Individuals were also asked if they volunteered. About 36% of the individuals completing the Household Telephone Survey reported that they regularly volunteered. This is considerably lower than Indiana's statewide average of 55.5% (UWA, 1998). The 64% who do not regularly volunteer provide a variety of reasons for not doing so. The main reason given is "lack of time" (46%). Other reasons include "health problems or disability" (5%), "age" (3%), "family responsibilities" (6%), "not interested" (4%). According to the United Way of America, the percentage of adults volunteering has been declining nationally. This is a challenge for providers who rely on a strong volunteer base to carry out many of their programs and activities.

## Client Survey Group Results–Community Strengths

Four local providers conducted 42 individual interviews with clients. Compared to the general population, a greater percentage (39%) of these individuals do not consider themselves to be part of a neighborhood, while 61% do. The people who live near these clients do not come together to work on common problems (79%) versus 21% who had worked together.

The clients were asked the same three questions about the relative strength of their neighborhood.

How often do people who are different from one another, for example, young and old, established residents and newcomer, black and white, participate together in neighborhood activities?

Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
18%	24%	18%	41%

How often do people who live near you watch out for each other?

Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
25%	43%	15%	18%

Respondents from the general population were much more likely to believe that their neighbors watch out for each other than those from the client groups, 79% versus 58% respectively. While some of the individuals in the client survey group were homeless, many were renting, and some owned their own home. Despite the fact that many of these clients have relatively permanent homes, they do not have as strong a sense of neighborhood, networking or support.

Interestingly, just over 45% of the clients regularly do volunteer work, more than the general household populations surveyed (36%). The reasons given for not volunteering were similar to those of the general population: “not enough time” (56%), “health problems or disabilities” (28%), and “not interested” (11%).

### **Need for Additional Cultural Diversity Services**

Key informants included representatives of a variety of cultures and ethnicities. They identified several needs, including:

- The Korean community needs a center to organize services and address translation needs and cultural differences. It also needs legal assistance. It would be helpful for the four Korean churches, which are seen as the center of the Korean community, to provide after school programs, tutors, and SAT classes. They also need to work with single International students from the university to address relationship issues such as dating and premarital sex.
- There is a growing Spanish-speaking population, including some families affiliated with the university. Challenges in working with this population include dealing with poverty and cultural needs, integration and education issues. Public school teachers can help service providers reach families through the children. The Spanish-speaking population is growing so rapidly, it is difficult to develop an accurate picture of how many Hispanics are living in Monroe County from census data alone.

- Health services are often not accessible to individuals without insurance or documentation. Pregnant women will often only see a doctor once in the first three months and then again when they deliver. There was a prenatal care pilot project at CHAP, but it ended when the funding ran out. There is also a need for affordable dental and vision care. The population makes choices that are not healthy; some take drugs and drink. Many interpreters do not know specialized health-related terminology and there are few mental health services with bilingual, bi-cultural therapists.
- The City of Bloomington's Parks and Recreation Department offers Spanish classes, but they are too expensive for many service providers that might otherwise choose to train their employees.
- Language barriers, transportation and lack of documentation limit accessibility to services. Some organizations would like to see bilingual staff at the Office of Family and Children (OFC) and a bilingual version of the Herald Times VITAL column.
- Some public school teachers are not trained to work effectively with the international students in their classrooms. There is not enough time, funding or staff to deliver training.
- Bloomington has always had international visitors and immigrants but until recently they were usually university educated. Now, many of the immigrants joining the community have little or no academic preparation and poor socioeconomic prospects. Their children suffer from a lack of academic support at home.
- The NAACP also indicates a need for legal assistance for minority ethnic groups and additional resources to address civil rights issues. The agency is short staffed and sometimes clients have to wait 6-8 months for services.

## **Community Resources**

- La Casa, an Indiana University-based organization, has partnered with the city government and local churches. The agency's main services are making referrals, providing information, and educating the public about Latino/a issues. Its focus is on general support services for Latino students only. Ideally, it would like to have programs for Latinos not involved with the university, and utilize university resources to help the broader community. The staff at La Casa regularly work with students who are dealing with culture shock and the pressures of being a first-generation college student
- The Monroe County Public Library has been adding Spanish-language materials and including Spanish speakers in the VITAL program.

- Mujeres en Conexion (MEC) is an organization that provides a safe, comfortable environment for Spanish-speaking women to discuss their needs and receive emotional and practical support. Through monthly meetings, it encourages members to be self-sufficient, independent and productive. It also has a summer camp, celebrate family holidays, make referrals and provide counseling. MEC believes that there are many good services in the community, but would like them to be adjusted for different ethnic groups.
- The Bloomington Volunteer Network is making an effort to recruit volunteers who are bilingual.
- The Commission on the Status of Black Males is conducting research on the unemployment rate and job training needs of African American males.
- The Monroe County School Corporation has an office to serve the educational needs of international students in the public school system, K-12, including cultural adaptation, parent involvement, language acquisition and social integration, as well as social support services. It collaborates with other agencies that serve the same population, such as Indiana University and area churches, to make the best use of local resources.
- The faith-based community provides a variety of services to support culturally diverse populations and low-income families. The downtown churches house the Hispanic Center (Trinity Church), a Family Resource Center (First Presbyterian Church), the Shalom Center and FoodWorks run by Middle Way House (First United Methodist Church). Several of these churches provide assistance with bus passes and child care.
- The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Student Support Services office at IU is a resource center, offering information, support, and referral for GLBT individuals.

### **Places to Start**

- Develop a more comprehensive plan for training and placing bi-lingual counselors and other human service staff and volunteers in organizations throughout the community.
- Support the efforts of existing groups that are working to improve awareness of cultural needs and to provide services to diverse populations.
- Examine and address barriers to volunteering and work to develop cadres of qualified volunteers to support human service organizations.
- Build on successful service learning partnerships, including American Humanics and the Advocates for Community Engagement (ACE).