

CULTURAL CAPITAL:

**Strengthening Community Identity
and Introducing the CD+SI Toolkit™**

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Georgia has 159 counties and 535 incorporated places, including 425 cities and 105 towns. Many of these communities have distinct cultural environments involving unique customs and traditions. These unique cultural atmospheres can influence the development of local identities and create connections between people and the places in which they live and work. This is evident, for example, when a local area becomes linked to an important resource, such as a vital crop, the natural beauty of a particular region, or rich cultural diversity. Community members often celebrate the association with festivals and other functions, which can further strengthen the connection and reinforce community and personal identity.



People frequently feel a genuine connection to their local communities. These feelings of attachment might result from a number of factors, such as special personal relationships, involvement in organized local activities, and positive sentiments or impressions of the community. Support for a community might develop and grow when local opportunities and experiences satisfy an individual's need for a sense of belonging or identity, personal growth, cultural enrichment, and other quality-of-life concerns. Residents often identify with their communities in ways that reflect perceptions of historical developments. When a community's heritage is recognized and celebrated, residents share in any benefits produced by these cultural assets. Even when a community confronts unflattering periods of its history, residents can seize the opportunity to establish new cultural perspectives which pay tribute to change, growth, and transformation.



Defining Cultural Capital at the Community Level

Cultural capital refers to the resources that make up a community's tangible and intangible creative assets. Tangible assets can include historical buildings, sites, and other structures, as well as local art, sculptures, and crafts. Intangible assets include community traditions, customs, values, practices, music, and literature, which contribute to a community's identity and distinguish community members. These items of cultural capital can contribute to the overall cultural value existing within a community.

Cultural capital is a reflection of how people within a community experience the world around them. It also provides some indication of who should be followed, listened to, and believed. It includes the personal growth and change that occur as a result of relationships with others from diverse backgrounds. For example, partnerships and cooperation among people of different races and ethnicities can be considered a form of cultural capital which could be used to more adequately address community issues affecting minority residents.

Using the CD+SI Toolkit™ to Measure Community Perceptions of Cultural Capital

Communities often seek local residents' input when pursuing community or economic development projects. Providing a way for community members to offer their advice, share their ideas, and make recommendations is critical for increasing engagement and building support for development efforts and other programs. Participation in any decision-making process involving cultural capital is important because of the implications for community identity. Residents are likely to have existing ideas about their community's identity, how that identity should be acknowledged and communicated, and what it means for how they view and describe themselves.



The Community Diagnostics + Social Impact (CD+SI) Toolkit™ provides a quantitative tool to consider how residents perceive local cultural assets. By determining community perceptions of cultural capital, local leaders and other community members may be better prepared to assess whether people are aware of a distinct local culture based on certain criteria. The CD+SI Toolkit™ measures whether residents believe their community (1)

reflects a potentially diverse set of values, (2) holds events that recognize local heritage, (3) has organizations that preserve community history, (4) has local retailers that offer culturally relevant products, and (5) is culturally diverse. By understanding residents' perceptions of local cultural capital, local leaders and community development professionals can begin to further engage and involve citizens in efforts to establish and clarify local culture, bring together various groups to better integrate and represent a community's diversity, and generate cultural value.



Culture can provide a sense of identity and also a sense of place within a community. Frequently, understanding and appreciating the culture of a community can provide valuable insights regarding history, present environment, and potential futures.

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