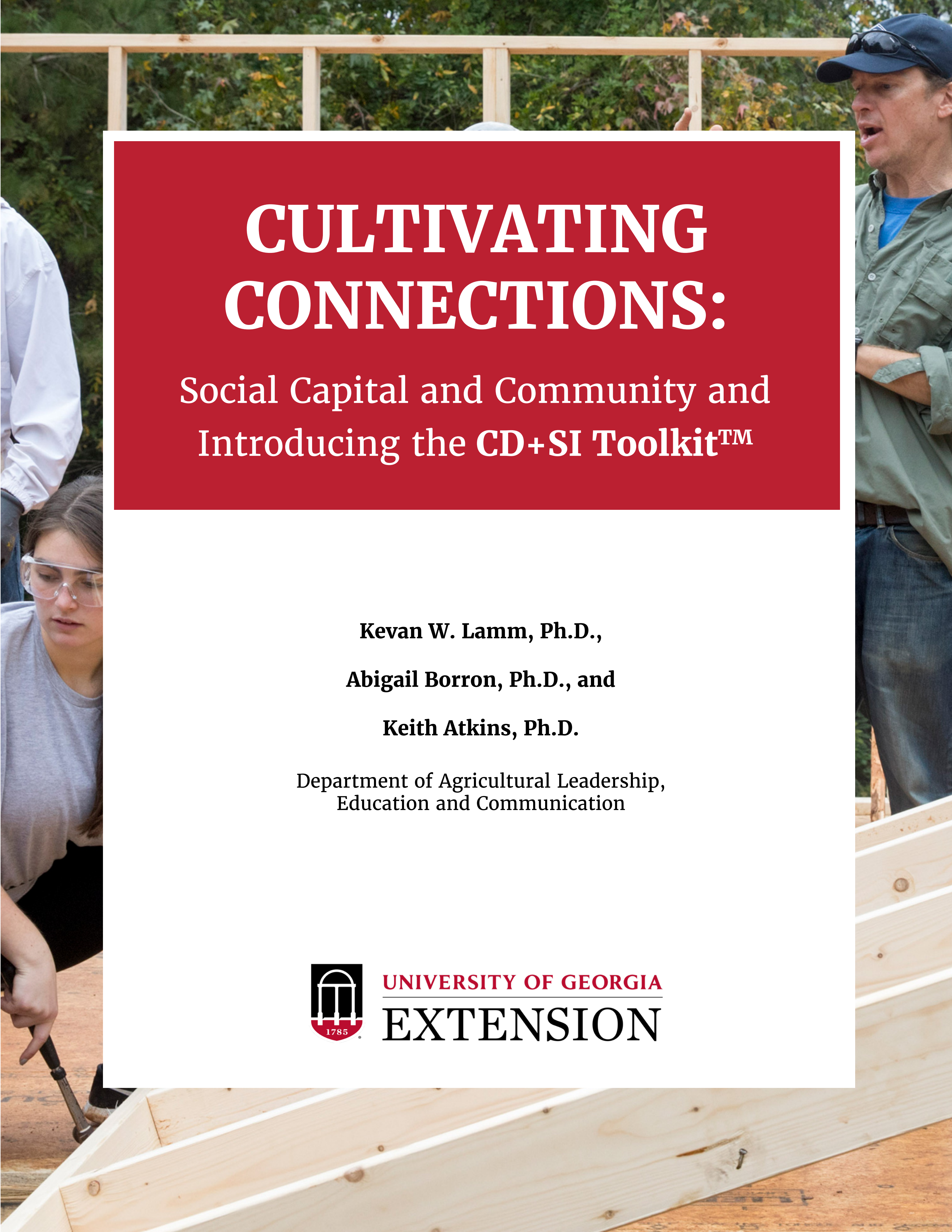

CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS:

Social Capital and Community and Introducing the **CD+SI Toolkit™**

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Residents of local communities in Georgia often associate with one another to achieve a common goal, maintain and develop relationships, or simply enjoy the company of others. Some residents, for example, might donate their time and effort to build affordable housing for local families, provide meals to senior citizens, or pick up litter in public spaces. Others might become involved with various civic, professional, or recreational associations to build relationships within a community. Many residents have discovered volunteer or service opportunities in programs offered by University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. In fiscal year 2019, a total of 12,535 volunteers helped 312 Extension agents implement thousands of programs throughout the state of Georgia. As a result of these significant

volunteer contributions and the considerable expertise provided by agents and specialists, Extension programs reached over two million Georgians. The partnership between Extension professionals and local volunteers is based on supportive relationships, mutual trust, and a shared purpose. These factors encourage ongoing cooperation and promote civic engagement, resulting in greater social capital within a community.

What is Social Capital?

Social capital refers to resources resulting from relationships and networks within a community. These resources include the established expectations and practices (or norms) that shape the behavior of community or group members, known penalties for disregarding these norms, higher levels of trust, and the give and take transactions necessary for cooperation. Local residents are expected to act in ways that benefit other community members and the broader public. When these norms are observed and individuals work together as a cohesive group, the amount of social capital within a community will increase. If behavioral expectations are ignored and relationships built on mutual trust are weakened, a community will experience a reduction in social capital.

While an increase in social capital is usually considered a positive development for a community, it is important to note some potentially negative consequences. For example, active local citizens who generate most of the social capital in a community might resent inactive residents who are dependent on those resources. In addition, some group members might object to restrictions on personal behavior if regulations are considered excessive or unwarranted. There is also some concern that the established norms used to maintain group identity might result in a lack of diversity and distrust of residents who are different. Another potential downside of conformity is the tendency to minimize or dismiss the achievements of group members when they are inconsistent with expectations. It is important for communities to recognize and manage these negative consequences when attempting to cultivate and expand social capital.

While social capital can lead to undesirable outcomes in some cases, these resources will typically enable communities to function more effectively by engaging residents and encouraging teamwork. Communities with limited social capital, however, may lack the trusting and supportive relationships necessary for citizen participation and cooperation. So, how can local leaders and residents measure social capital within their communities? One method is to determine community perceptions of social capital, which is the extent to which community members perceive the availability of these resources.

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

Estimating community perceptions of social capital can be accomplished by examining community members' awareness of local relationships and related resources. The Community Diagnostics + Social Impact (CD+SI) Toolkit™ is developed to provide a quantitative measure of whether community members (1) value the concerns of other community members, (2) associate with their neighbors and local leaders, (3) trust their neighbors and local leaders, (4) can voice their concerns, and (5) are able to participate in local projects to solve problems. This approach involves determining local residents' awareness of these relationships and resources so communities can estimate the amount of social capital available to a community.

Understanding how residents perceive various aspects of social capital can allow communities to use this information to guide relevant discussions, establish priorities, and develop programs that target specific goals. These insights may help communities cultivate personal connections among local residents that promote trust and create the foundations for mutually beneficial relationships. It is important for local leaders and other residents to understand social capital and how it can benefit their communities.

Social capital is often referred to as the relationship between individuals within a network, such as a community. These relationships are vital to the effective functioning of communities as they help to establish norms, trust, and shared identity among members. Therefore, considering social capital may provide important insights regarding the functioning of a community and potential opportunities for future growth.

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