

TOWN FORUM

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GUEST OPINION

The 'Better Together' campaign

41 ways to increase your social capital

The "Better Together" campaign, being launched in central New Jersey by the Princeton Area Community Foundation and the Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce Foundation, is designed to encourage people, organizations and businesses to become more engaged in their respective communities.

In addition to releasing the results of a 19-community survey of civic involvement throughout the region, the two groups have issued the following list of ways for individuals to increase their "social capital" by becoming more engaged with those around them.

- Organize a social gathering to welcome a new neighbor
- Register to vote — and vote every time
- Support your local merchants
- Start a community garden
- Help fix someone's flat tire
- Join the local Elks, Kiwanis, or Knights of Columbus

- Sing in a choir
- Attend Memorial Day parades and 4th of July fireworks
- Form a tool lending library with neighbors and share ladders, snow blowers, etc.
- Eat breakfast at a local gathering spot on Saturdays (and mingle!)
- Join the volunteer fire department
- Stand at a major intersection holding a sign for your favorite candidate
- Persuade a local restaurant to have a designated "meet people" table
- Say "thanks" to public servants — police, firefighters, town clerks, teachers
- Plant tree seedlings along your street with neighbors and rotate care for them
- Talk with those you see every day on your commuter train
- Carpool to the station with them

- Enroll in a class and get to know your classmates
- Say hello to strangers
- Log off and go to the park
- Say hello when you spot an acquaintance in a store
- Exercise together or take walks with friends or family
- Collect oral histories from older town residents
- Join a book club.
- Tell friends and family what social capital is and why it matters!
- Read the local news faithfully
- Fix it even if you didn't break it
- Pick it up even if you didn't drop it
- Attend a public meeting
- Hire young people for odd jobs
- Sit on your stoop and greet passers-by
- Be nice when you're behind the wheel
- Join or start a mall-walking

group and have coffee together afterwards

- Become a story-reader or baby rocker at a childcare center or neighborhood pre-school
 - Open the door for someone who has his or her hands full
 - Offer to watch your neighbor's home or apartment while they are away
 - See if your neighbor needs anything when you run to the store
 - Join groups (e.g., arts, sports, religion) likely to lead to making new friends that bridge across race/ethnicity, social class or other social cleavages
 - Walk your dog in a different neighborhood or park
 - Tutor someone
 - Read bulletin boards and try something new.
- To learn more about the "Better Together" campaign, go to www.pacf.org.*