

Community Connections

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Voter participation levels
- Neighborhood Connection Index
- % of Aspen workers who commute more than 10 miles
- Ratio of permanent residents to total housing units
- % of households where English is not spoken at home

Desired Outcome: Residents have a variety of opportunities for nurturing relationships and spirituality. Choices for community engagement through schools, non-profits, churches, businesses, and local government are plentiful. Participation rates in key opportunities are high, across age groups, income groups and ethnicities. Residents report having supportive relationships; actively participating in activities of importance to them; enjoying their community; and taking pride in their community.

A socially sustainable community boasts an abundance of means to connect – culturally, spiritually, intellectually, and civically. This means that not only are opportunities available, but they are diverse and pique varied interests.

These range from the whimsical Mac and Cheese Festival on the street to the premier international classical music festival concerts in Harris Hall. The well-linked transportation system allows mobility and transport to the various offerings for a majority of Roaring Fork Valley residents.



Figure 1. 2016 Aspen Citizens Academy Class²

Many groups, organizations, foundations, and associations offer these opportunities. Whether a lecture on physics or a Saturday Farmer’s Market, such gatherings help to build cohesion and social capital within the community.

Social capital refers to “the links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together.”¹ Social capital can also include the networks that facilitate co-operation among groups.¹ Shared norms, values, and understandings allow for a supportive, engaged, and proud community.

¹ “What is Social Capital?” OECD Insights: Human Capital. P. 102. <https://www.oecd.org/insights/37966934.pdf>.

² Holder, Michelle. 2016.

Fostering a Sense of Place and Belonging

The Aspen community offers many spaces, programs, shared resources, events, offerings, and opportunities to connect. These include:

- Gathering spaces for special events and public/private use
- Volunteer and engagement opportunities per a multitude of non-profits dedicated to helping others and supporting causes
- Locals' events, clinics, and specials
- Markets, fairs, and festivals
- Sharing economy commute options
- Local art and public displays
- Community-centered programs such as the Citizens Academy

These opportunities allow individuals to feel included and connected as members of their community.

Aspen is also home to many cultures and languages. Given the wide array of languages, the lack of English language may be a barrier for some. Other times, the unique variety of people can gather and connect around many languages.

The key performance measures that provides perspective on this area include:

- *Neighborhood Connection Index*
- *% of Aspen workers who commute more than 10 miles*
- *Ratio of permanent residents to total housing units*
- *% of households where English is not the primary language spoken at home*

Participation & Engagement Opportunities

A more socially connected community is more apt to be aware and take interest and ownership in community issues. Aspen's level of community engagement is in part represented by voter turnout in city and county elections. Turnout indicates community's overall level of political participation, as well as, citizen interest in influencing local decisions.

Engagement opportunities can also be represented by the sheer number of programs and events that happen in the area. Those can be of different forms – social, cultural, educational, non-profit, recreational, and spiritual.

The effect is an intelligent, caring, activated community working together to better the quality of life for all. Such communities can stand to serve as models for others.

Understanding Social Capital

Socially sustainable communities are equitable, diverse, connected, democratic, and provide a good quality of life.¹ Social capital – the links within a community – mutually reinforces these desired traits.

In a socially sustainable place, residents feel that they can rely on one another. Residents work together for the betterment of the community. Tolerance and respect for others is generous, for all backgrounds and viewpoints.

Such connections can be built by way of large events and organizations. They can also be built on a grassroots level.

An individual can act to build social capital in many ways. A few examples are listed below.

- Attend town meetings
- Volunteer special skills to an organization
- Mentor someone of a different ethnic or religious group
- Register to vote and vote

For more ideas, visit:

<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/saguaro/about-social-capital/what-you-can-do>

The key performance measures that provides perspective on this area include:

- *Voter participation levels*
- *Access to engagement opportunities, by type*

The metrics listed above are presented in the respective “Sustainability Measures” section of this report.

Current & Proposed Actions

Below is a summary of programs, initiatives, and recommendations that support Community Connections outcomes and associated key performance measures. Note the web links highlighted for each organization for more detailed information.

Fostering a Sense of Place and Belonging

Various organizations and initiatives ranging from housing to transit help to foster a sense of place.

Current Actions

- The [Aspen Pitkin County Housing Authority \(APCHA\)](#) provides affordable workforce housing to full-time or seasonal employees who seek housing in proximity to the community where they choose to live and work.
- The [Aspen Chamber Resort Association \(ACRA\)](#) is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the business community and enhancing the visitor experience. ACRA supports many large special events and gatherings in the community.
- [Roaring Fork Transportation Authority \(RFTA\)](#) provides a variety of regional public transit options for locals and visitors from Aspen to Rifle.
- RFTA system-wide ridership reached an all-time high of 5.5 million rides in 2017.
- The [VelociRFTA Bus Rapid Transit \(BRT\)](#) service is the first rural BRT system in the nation and transports SH 82 commuters from Aspen to Glenwood Springs.
- Priority bus lanes in the City of Aspen and along SH 82 from Buttermilk to Maroon Creek Road promote faster high occupancy travel.
- The [City of Aspen Transportation department](#) contracts with RFTA to offer [eight free shuttle routes](#) throughout town for easier transit to local destinations.
- In 2016, the Burlingame bus route frequency was increased as part of a pilot program to encourage more bus use on this route. This service improvement is temporary.
- Free parking permits are available for commuters who carpool into town.
- [Aspen](#) and the [Highway 82 corridor](#) offer bus lanes to promote faster high occupancy travel.
- [We-Cycle](#) is a nonprofit dedicated to bringing bike sharing to Aspen, Basalt, and the Roaring Fork Valley as part of a public/private partnership. We-Cycle expanded into Basalt in May 2016.
- RFTA is working with We-Cycle to develop a longer-term partnership; the RFTA Board approved a multi-year commitment to supporting We-Cycle.
- The City of Aspen [Downtown](#) offers free, on-demand door-to-door electric car service within the core area boundaries.
- The Elected Officials Transportation Committee (EOTC) is an interjurisdictional committee of Pitkin County, City of Aspen, and Town of Snowmass Village elected officials to discuss long-range transportation issues.

Proposed Actions

- RFTA proposes to continue the following actions for its workplan in support of the metrics and outcomes:
 - Transportation Demand Management
 - Improve integration with the public transit system and first-last mile connectivity with other forms of transportation (e.g. We-Cycle)
 - Optimized bus route frequency and headways
- The City of Aspen and APCA are working to build new affordable housing developments in town and throughout the county.

Participation & Engagement Opportunities

Opportunities to engage in Aspen, Pitkin County, and the Roaring Fork Valley generally, are ample. Measures are taken to make voting more accessible. Events, programs, and organizations are available to engage in community offerings and issues.

Current Actions

- The [City of Aspen](#) and [Pitkin County](#) use mail ballots to encourage voter participation; ballots are mailed to all active registered voters and can be returned via mail or in person.
- [APCHA](#) continues to work with down valley and regional partners on ways to enhance workforce housing opportunities. APCA is contributing funds to a regional housing assessment.
- The [Next Generation Advisory Commission](#) employs various efforts to increase voter participation.
- Civic and social groups in the area connect people throughout the Valley and region, including the [Aspen Elks Lodge](#), the [Fraternal Order of Eagles](#), and the [Rotary Club](#), among others.
- Professional associations such as [Aspen Young Professionals Association](#) connect people around a cause.
- The [Wheeler Opera House](#), [Aspen Historical Society](#), [Aspen Santa Fe Ballet](#), [Theatre Aspen](#), and the [Aspen Music Festival & School](#) are a few examples of the many rich cultural opportunities available for residents and visitors in Aspen. Nearby, the [Summer in Snowmass Free Concert Series](#) offers entertainment for all ages from June-September.
- The [Aspen Citizens Academy](#) is a City-run course offering an in-depth understanding of government functions and informing participants of opportunities to be civically involved.
- [Our Community Listens](#) is a free three-day communication skills course to raise awareness of communication profiles and core behavioral tendencies of others. The course uses classroom instruction, experiential activity, and group discussion to explore communication, verbal and body language, listening, and confrontation.
- [Roaring Fork Leadership](#) is an annual leadership development program. The course brings 40 community members through 100+ hours of training and dialogue critical for personal, professional, and community problem solving and effectiveness.
- The [Aspen Institute](#) is a nonpartisan forum for values-based leadership and the exchange of ideas. The Aspen Institute produces the [Ideas Festival](#), a public gathering place for leaders from around the globe and across many disciplines to engage in deep and inquisitive discussion of the ideas and issues that both shape our lives and challenge our times.
- The [Aspen Center for Physics](#) is a dedicated research center where theoretical physicists gather from around the world. It offers participants an opportunity to work independently and/or collaboratively in advancing scientific research and knowledge.

- [Aspen Center for Environmental Studies \(ACES\)](#) is a non-profit environmental science education center with four sites in the Roaring Fork Valley. ACES provides programs in environmental science and ecological literacy to build a community of knowledgeable, motivated and capable environmental stewards.
- Over three hundred [non-profit organizations](#) exist in the Roaring Fork Valley. These organizations offer invaluable services to causes of all kinds, including health, human services, crime, environment, education, animals, and many others. They also offer an array of volunteering opportunities. Donors and foundations such as the [Aspen Community Foundation](#) support such organizations. Other groups such as [Spring Board](#) encourage volunteerism and philanthropy in the community.
- The Aspen area is home to the four [Aspen-Snowmass ski mountains](#) and the [Ashcroft Ski Touring Center](#).
- The [Aspen Golf Course](#) offers golfing in the warmer months and the [Aspen Cross-Country Ski Center](#) Nordic trails in the winter.
- Hundreds of parks, trails, and open spaces in [Aspen and Pitkin County](#) are available for recreational use. The [Aspen Recreation Center](#) and [Aspen Red Brick Recreation Center](#) offer dozens of sport and activity options.
- Many spiritual and faith-based communities are available in the Aspen area.
- The [Pitkin County Senior Services Center](#) facilitates quality of life and independence for individuals over 60 by offering events, activities, wellness options, meals, transportation, and resources.
- [Lead with Love: Project Wellbeing](#) is an initiative to connect community and build wellbeing in Aspen and beyond. Project Wellbeing uses data to measure wellness in the community and prioritize efforts accordingly. Project Wellbeing sponsors several workplace wellness programs.

Proposed Actions

- [APCHA](#) is preparing for a Housing Inventory Census in 2019 for successful implementation of the Housing Efficiency Reform Strategy (HERS) and the Housing Information Management System (HIMS).
- The [Aspen Citizens Academy](#) is working to offer class material in other mediums. This may include an internal offering for employees.