



Government  
of Canada

Policy Research  
Initiative

Gouvernement  
du Canada

Projet de recherche  
sur les politiques

# Social Capital as a Public Policy Tool

## Conclusions from the PRI Project

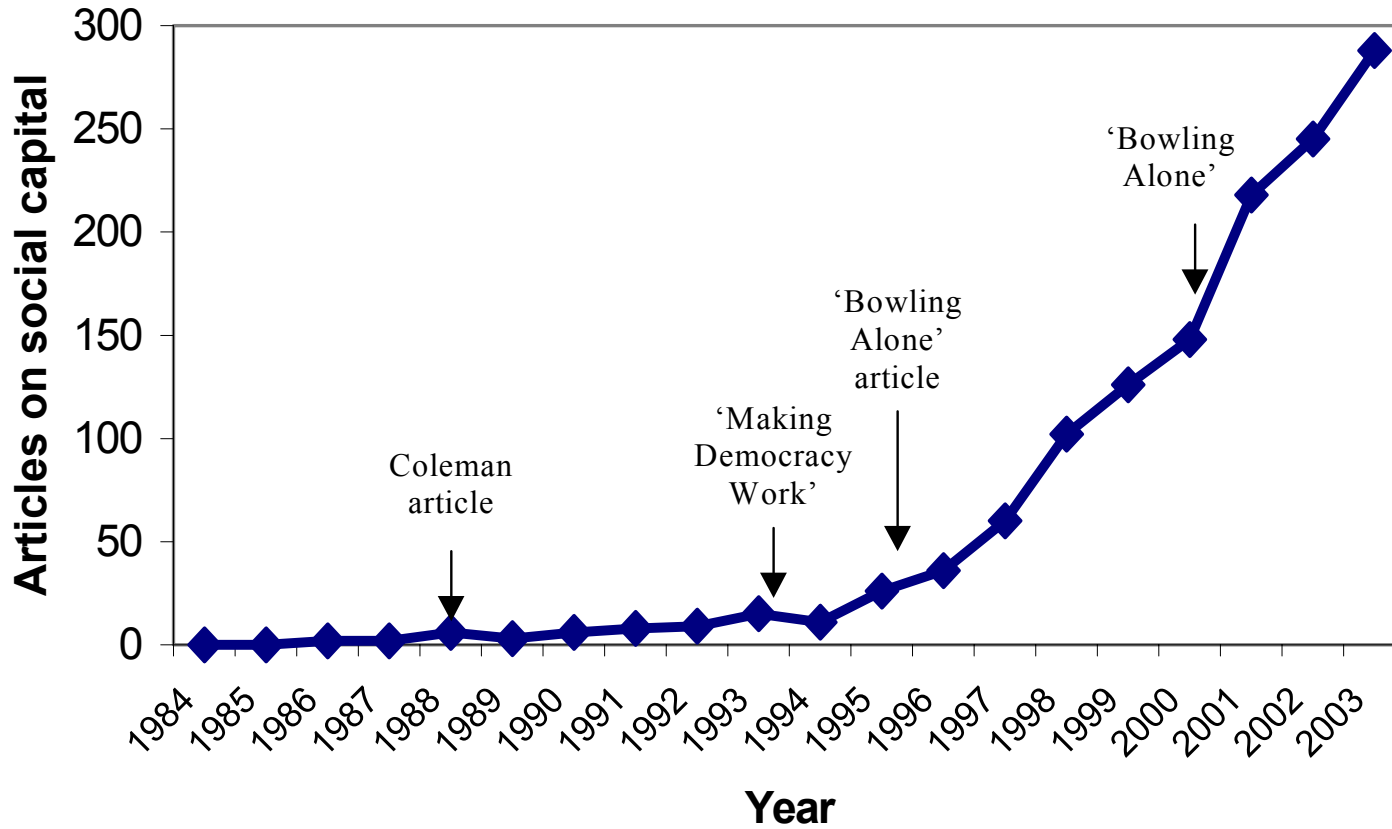
Presentation to the CERF Conference  
Understanding Cultural Diversity and the  
Economics of Social Inclusion and  
Participation  
May 25, 2006

Canada



# Interest in social capital has increased dramatically in recent years in academia

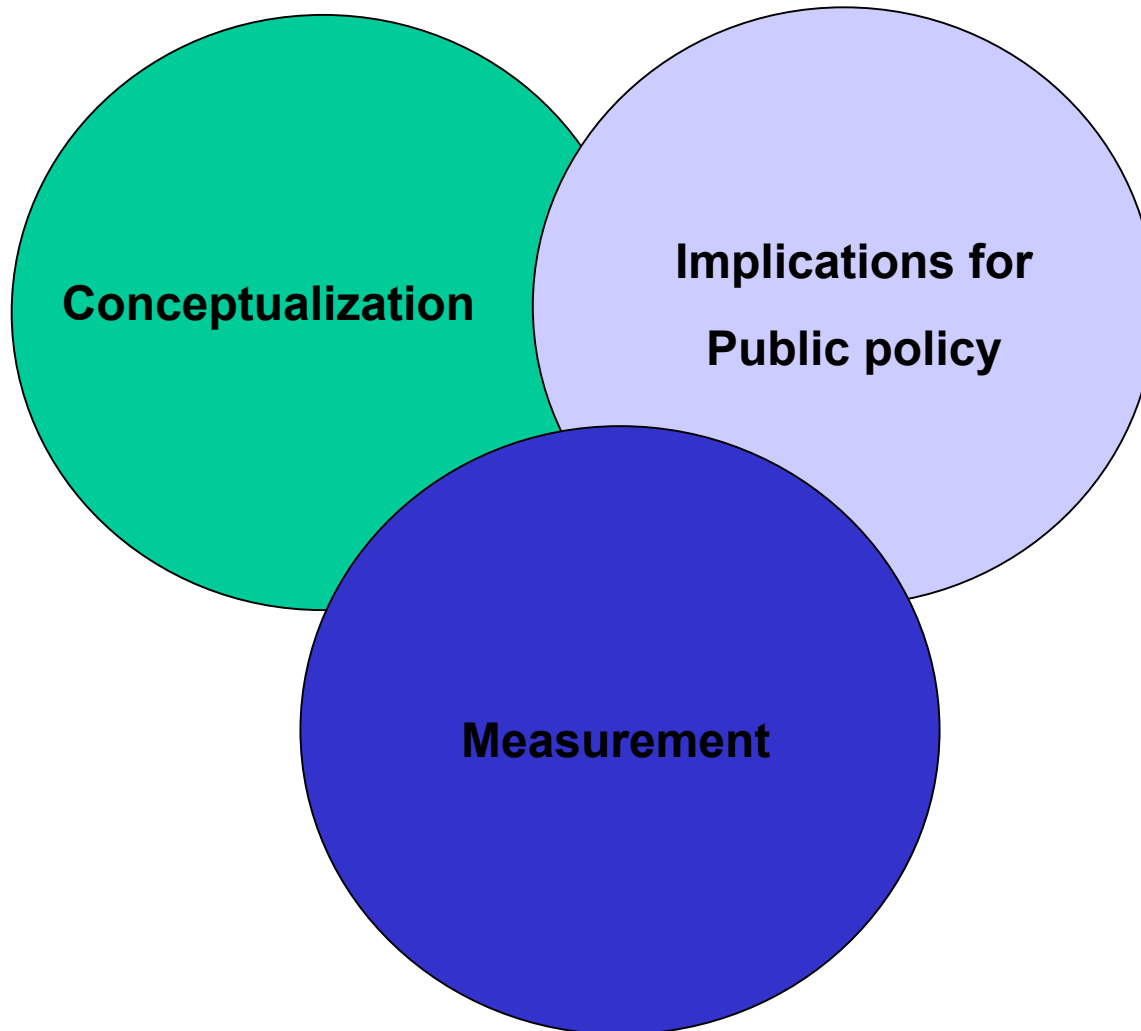
Articles Published Each Year on Social Capital, 1984-2003



(source: David Halpern, Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, UK)



# The PRI project



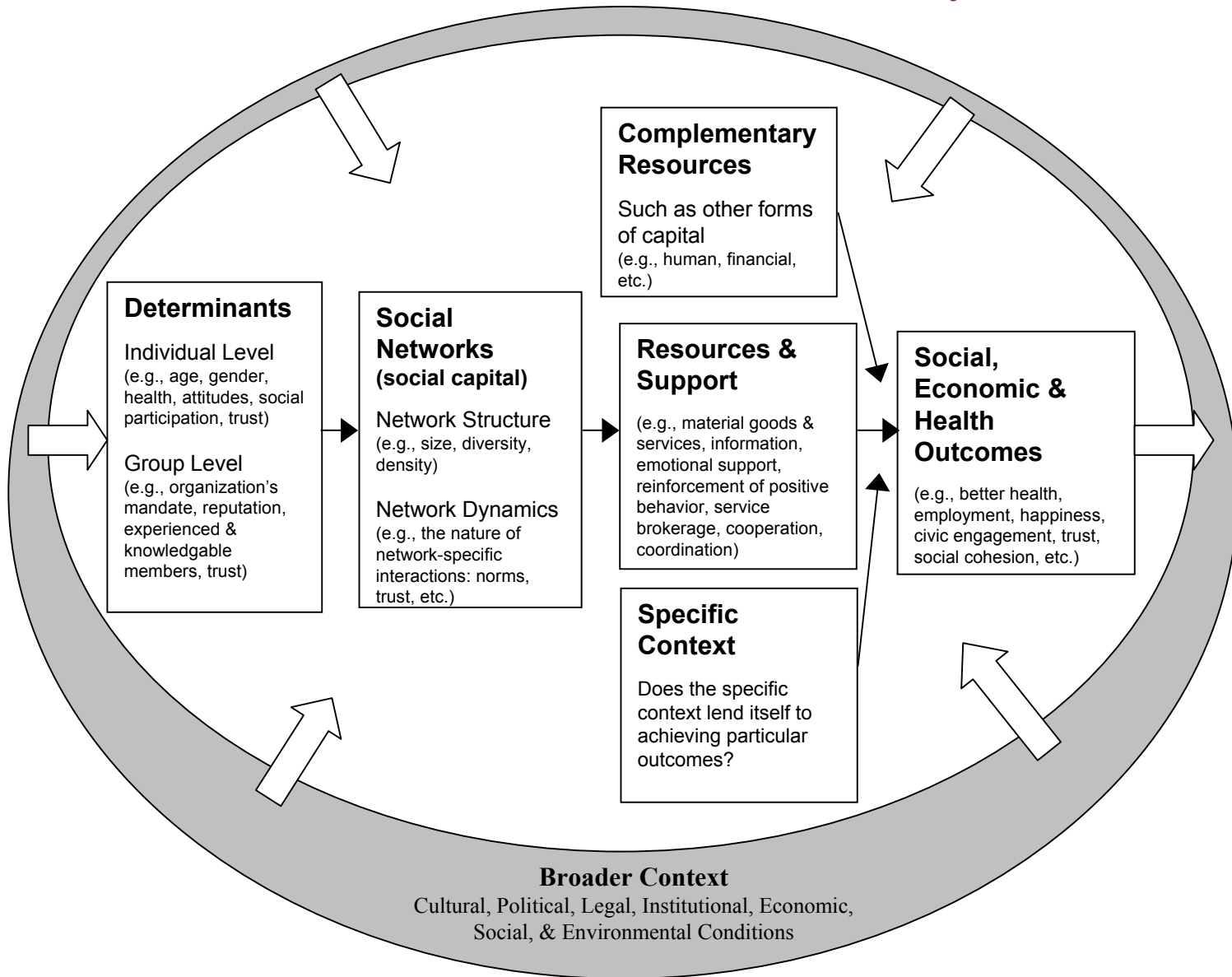


## The project has adopted a network-based approach to social capital ...

Social capital refers to the networks of social relations that may provide individuals and groups with access to resources and supports.



# ... within a broader framework for analysis





## Potential benefits of social network membership include:

- material goods and services
- information
- reduced transaction costs
- emotional support
- reinforcement of positive behaviour norms
- service brokerage



# Network differences matter

- Frequently cited typology:
  - Bonding
  - Bridging
  - Linking



# Is there a role for government?

- Governments already influence the development of social capital.
- A more systematic consideration of the role of social capital would be useful.



## Key areas for a social capital focus:

- Helping populations at risk of social exclusion
- Supporting major life-course transitions
- Promoting community development efforts



# Helping populations at risk of social exclusion

For example:

- new immigrants
- the long-term unemployed
- lone mothers
- youth at risk
- certain aboriginal communities

Having the right connections can make a difference



# Supporting key life-course transitions

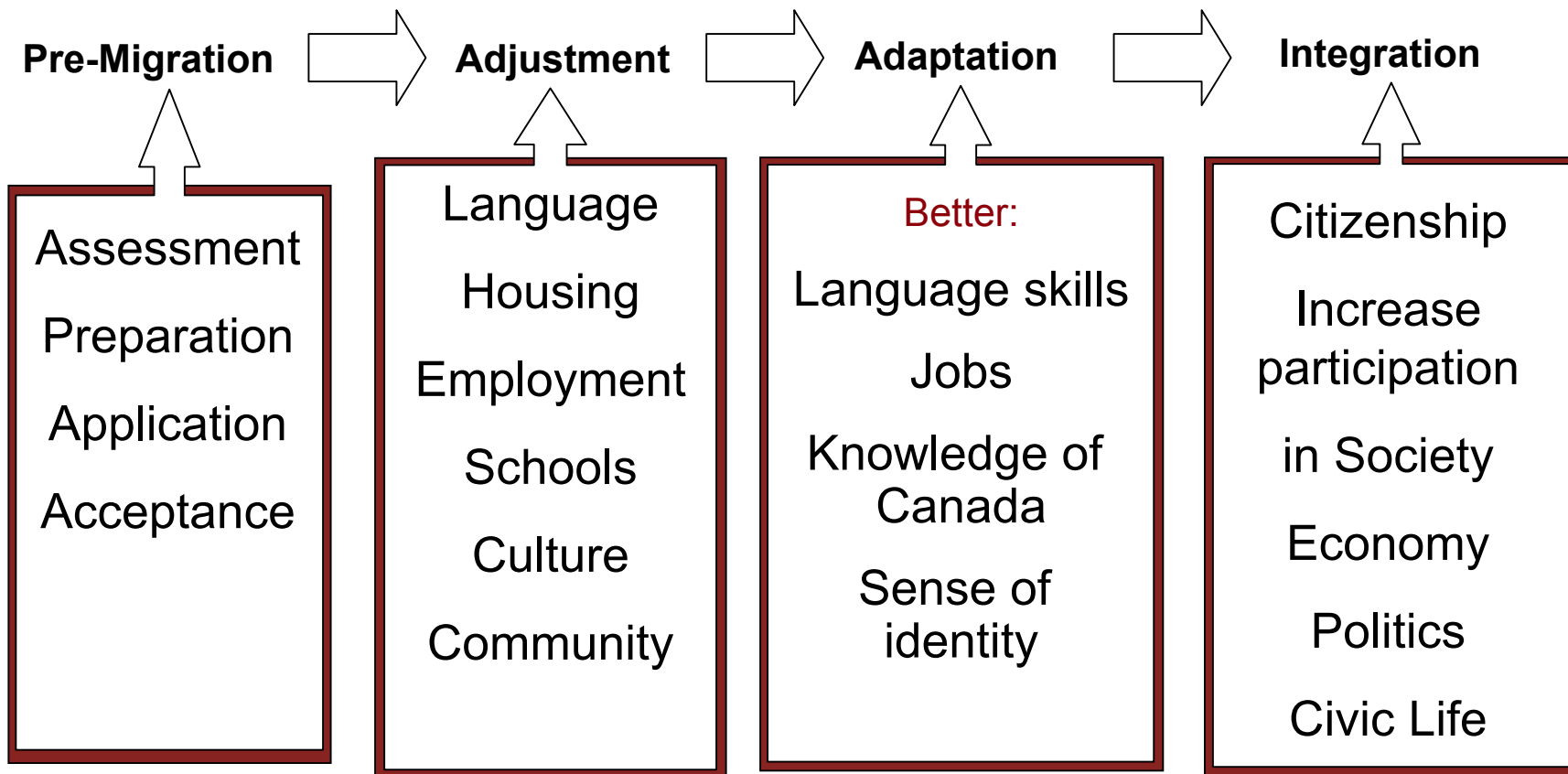
Examples of key life-course transitions include:

- the passage from school to labour-market
- fundamental changes to one's family (parenthood, marriage, divorce, death)
- Retirement
- loss of autonomy or ability to care for oneself
- Adapting into a new society

More Canadian data needed on the role of networks in these transitions (LSIC addresses some transitions in the early stages of integration among newcomers to Canada)



# Immigration: a key life-course transition



**Resources:** Government, Public Agencies, Markets, Community Organizations, Family and Friends, Individual



# The role of social capital in pre-migration

<b>Immigrants' network at landing, by immigration category, 2001</b>						
Network at landing	Family	Skilled worker (PA)	Skilled worker (SD)	Other economic	Refugees	All immigrants
Relatives at landing	64%	12%	18%	22%	40%	30%
Friends at landing	2%	52%	44%	37%	15%	33%
Relatives and friends	3%	22%	20%	22%	20%	24%
Neither	4%	13%	18%	19%	25%	13%
Due to rounding, percentages may not add up exactly to 100%						
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, LSIC						



# The role of social capital in settlement

Top three sources of help used by newcomers when encountered a problem			
	1	2	3
Access health services	Relatives/family members (38%)	Friends (37%)	Health workers (15%)
Find housing	Friends (63%)	Relatives/family members (22%)	Settlement organizations (11%)
Further education	Friends (35%)	Relatives/family members (32%)	School, college, university (32%)
Find a job	Friends (36%)	Relatives/family members (26%)	Settlement organizations (21%)
Source: LSIC, CIC, Priorities, Planning and Research			

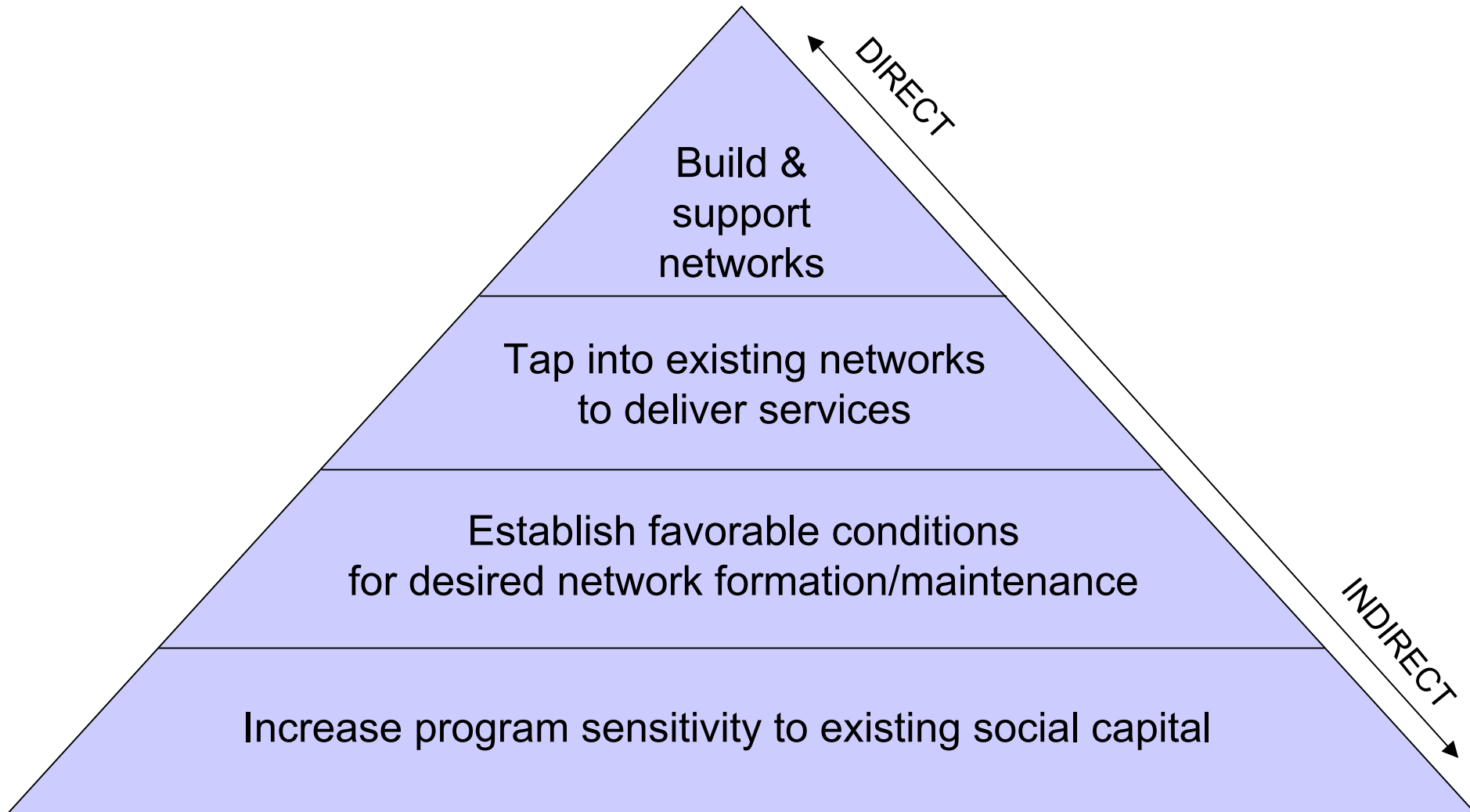


# The role of social capital in integration

- Lack of network: one of the key barriers to integration
  
- According to DeVoretz and Guo (2006), among a sample of Chinese immigrants, the top five major barriers to achieving their goals for migration include
  - Language difficulties (32.3%)
  - Lack of Canadian work experience (21.8%)
  - Lack of social network (17.7%)
  - Chinese work experience recognized (15.3%)
  - Chinese qualifications not recognized (15.3%)



# Making use of social capital in public policy: from direct to indirect influence





## Building and supporting networks where relevant for specific program objectives

Some programs already do this for newcomers:

- employability or job search programs
- Mentoring
- Host program
  - Emphasizes mutual understanding
  - Based on volunteers
  - Intangible outcomes

A more systematic evaluation of the social capital effects of these programs would be helpful.



# Tapping into existing social networks to deliver programs

- Immigrant-serving agencies
- The ‘Buddy Program’
- Online discussions



# Policy Application: Immigrant Integration

- Can settlement programs build social networks?
- Does social capital lead to better integration outcomes?



## Major directions for empirical social capital research:

- Measure the **presence** of social capital through structural properties of networks.
- Measure how social capital **operates** through the dynamics of networks.
- Approach social capital as an **explanatory variable**.

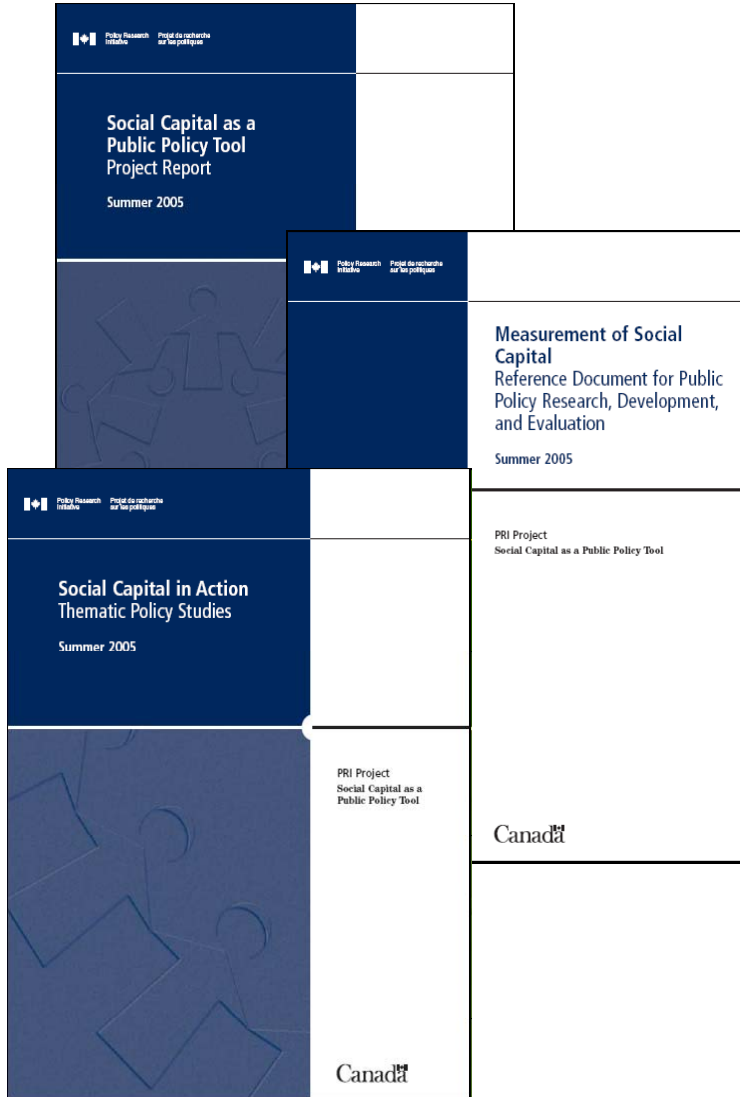


## Examples of research questions

- How do networks evolve over the course of life?
- What are the determinants of network formation?
- What is the role of ethnic communities in facilitating integration?
- How does network composition affect social, economic and health outcomes?
- In what context?



# PRI publications on social capital – September 2005



**Social Capital as a Public Policy Tool**  
Project Report

**Social Capital Measurement**  
A Reference Document for Public Policy Development and Evaluation

**Social Capital in Action**  
Thematic Policy Studies

This compilation of thematic studies explores the relevance and application of a social capital lens in eight specific policy and program areas in Canada: poverty reduction, aging well, settlement of new immigrants, educational outcomes of Aboriginal youth, youth civic engagement, community crime prevention, policing in First Nations communities, and local associations and community development.



# Proposal for new project on diversity for economic prosperity and social cohesion

- How could nations maintain its identity and cohesion while accommodating diversity?
- Would Canada's approach to diversity withstand the social and geopolitical realities of the 21st century?
- What are the policy levers that could enable governments to maximize the benefits of ethno-cultural diversity on the one hand, while minimizing the risks of social unrests and conflicts that could undermine the prosperity and cohesion of a society on the other?