

Developed by the PrepTalk partner organizations, PrepTalk Discussion Guides provide emergency managers with an easy-to-use outline of considerations and resources for each topic. Paired with the videos, these Discussion Guides can be used at meetings, workshops, and conferences to support meaningful dialogue with community leaders and the public to improve preparedness and to build resilience.

## Dr. Daniel Aldrich – Social Capital in Disaster Mitigation and Recovery

Dr. Aldrich's PrepTalk highlights research demonstrating how factors internal to a community are the real drivers of resilience rather than external factors such as outside aid. He breaks down the important role of different types of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking) and the role each serves to increase community resilience. Finally, his PrepTalk provides examples of how communities are innovating to increase social capital.

Dr. Aldrich is a political science professor and director of the Security and Resilience Program at Northeastern University. He has published four books, including *Building Resilience*, *Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery*, and more than 40 peer-reviewed articles. His [New York Times Op-Ed](#), summarizes his research, "I've concluded that the density and strength of social networks are the most important variables – not wealth, education or culture – in determining (a community's) resilience in the face of catastrophe." You can follow Dr. Aldrich's research and the release of his newest book, "Black Wave: Connections and Governance in Japan's 3/11 Disasters," at <http://daldrich.weebly.com>.

## Partners for the Discussion

We encourage you to bring together a diverse group of community leaders for this discussion. This may include other members of emergency management and social service agencies, elected public officials, local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster like the American Red Cross and Salvation Army, faith leaders, business leaders, organizations that support underserved populations, homeowners associations and other people or organizations involved with enhancing the social connectedness or your jurisdiction.

*A lot of theories we have  
about recovery focus on the  
wrong kinds of ideas.*

– Dr. Daniel Aldrich

Watch the video together to hear findings from Dr. Aldrich's field research and use this discussion guide and associated resources to start assessing and strengthening your community's social capital.



*The views expressed in PrepTalk presentations and the Q&A sessions are solely those of the speaker and do not represent the views of their organization or any of the PrepTalks partners.*

### Discussion Topics

#### Topic 1: Examine Planning Assumptions

Dr. Aldrich presents several common theories that are identified as factors that drive the ability for a community to recover. These are:

- **Money**, including personal wealth and funding from FEMA, insurance, and other outside aid organizations.
- **Governance**, how well governed the area is.
- **Level of Damage/Destruction**, the belief that a more powerful disaster, such as a massive earthquake, has a slower recovery process than a smaller scale disaster like a tornado.
- **Population Density**, the expectation that dense areas and cities are slower to recover than rural areas.
- **Inequality**, such as socio-economic disparity in the community.

*Many of the challenges that we face post disaster cannot be solved by one individual or one family themselves. Social ties give us this kind of informal insurance or mutual aid.*

– Dr. Daniel Aldrich

He then presents extensive research that makes the case that these factors are not as related to resilience as social capital.

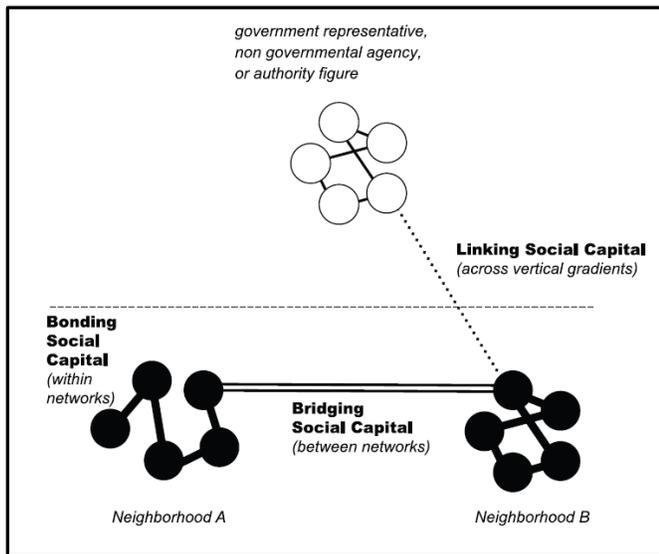
#### Questions for Discussion

In order to understand your community's vulnerabilities and to ensure the right people are part of the planning process, consider the following questions:

- How have these factors directly (or indirectly) influenced your plans for the community, as well as plans for organizations, businesses, or other groups?
- Are there any changes needed in your plans or your planning process as a result of potentially over-emphasizing these assumptions?

#### Topic 2: Social Capital as the Key Driver of Resilience

Dr. Aldrich argues that the core elements of resilience come from inside the community, from social capital or social ties. Dr. Aldrich presents three types of social capital:



Source: Aldrich PrepTalk slide

### Horizontal Ties

- **Bonding Social Capital:** connections among individuals who are emotionally close, such as friends or family, and result in tight bonds to a particular group.
- **Bridging Social Capital:** acquaintances of demographic diversity, such as class or race. Often comes from involvement in organizations including civic and political institutions, parent-teacher associations, sports clubs, and religious groups.

### Vertical Ties

- **Linking Social Capital:** connects regular citizens with those in power. Interactions tend to occur based on explicit, formal networks of authority.

Source: American Behavioral Scientist, Social Capital and Community Resilience, Aldrich and Meyer, p. 5-6, [http://daldrich.weebly.com/uploads/1/5/5/0/15507740/aldrich\\_american\\_behavioral\\_scientist\\_2014.pdf](http://daldrich.weebly.com/uploads/1/5/5/0/15507740/aldrich_american_behavioral_scientist_2014.pdf)

Dr. Aldrich's research shows that horizontal ties (bonding and bridging ties) are critical in the first stages of survival, in having residents stay in or return to the disaster area, and in mental health recovery. He explains that vertical ties (linking ties) are the best predictor of community recovery.

### Questions for Discussion

- How can our community's preparedness plans be enhanced by the potential for collective action? For example, how can we incorporate community organizations into our plans to provide greater and more effective pathways for residents to support preparedness, response, and recovery efforts?
- How do our plans incorporate ad hoc organizing that occurs after a disaster, supporting residents desire to help and provide each other informal mutual aid while also ensuring that this collective action is most effective?
- How do our preparedness plans acknowledge the stressors placed on our community's social capital post-disaster? What strategies could be deployed to maintain and even enhance our community's social capital during a disaster?
- How do we encourage our residents to return after a disaster and support the recovery process? Should our communication plan incorporate messaging to remind individuals of their attachments to our community?

- ❑ How can we use our understanding of social capital to reduce the psychological distress caused by a disaster by helping to maintain individuals' social networks, even if they have had to leave the community?
- ❑ What vertical ties does our jurisdiction have with state and federal officials? What connections do we have to officials that would be involved in the recovery process? Do we have the necessary relationships that can help our community post-disaster?

*The only factor that consistently helped reduce anxiety post a nuclear evacuation was having friends and family nearby...to help you feel normal again.*

– Dr. Daniel Aldrich

### Topic 3: Promoting Social Capital

In his book “Building Resilience, Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery,” Dr. Aldrich tells us that “post-disaster social networks are likely to tightly mirror pre-disaster conditions.” (p. 53) Given the clear benefits from high levels of social capital presented in Dr. Aldrich’s PrepTalk, investing in building social ties will pay significant dividends for emergency managers.

Dr. Aldrich also highlights some innovative examples of ways to build social capital. He recommends bringing preparedness training and demonstrations to existing social infrastructure.

#### The Kessler-6 or K-6 Distress Scale

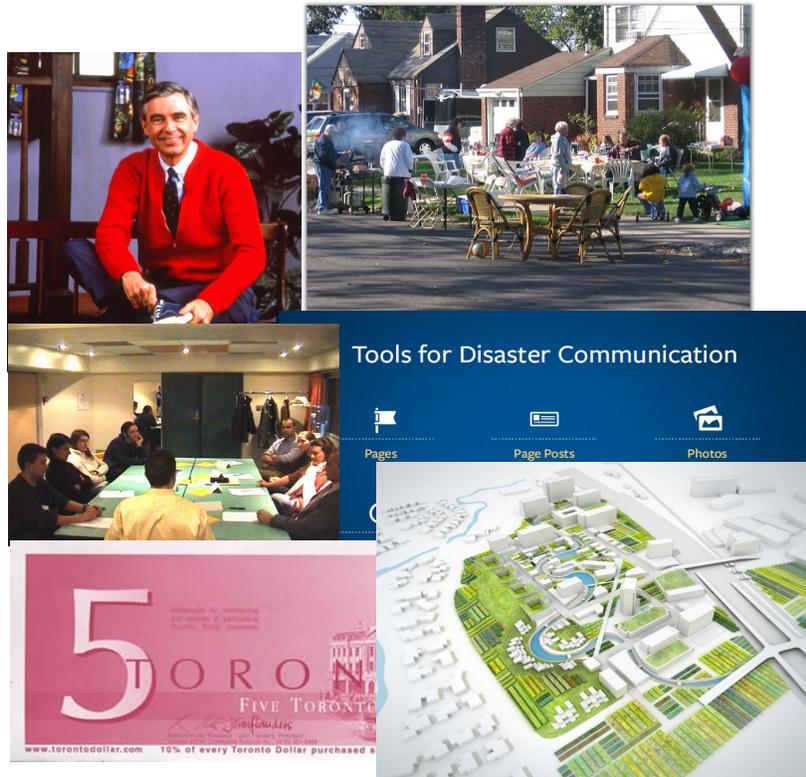
The K-6 is a 6-item inventory rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. It is a truncated version of the K-10 and its purpose is also to function as a global measure of distress drawing from depressive and anxiety related symptomology. It measures distress over a period of four weeks prior to administration of the test. The K-6 contains several additional questions; however, these are supplementary and not required for scoring the K-6.

*Reality is that disaster resilience comes from internal factors: How connected are we? How much trust do we have in each other? How often do we work together?*

– Dr. Daniel Aldrich

#### Building Social Capital

- Encourage people getting to know immediate neighbors.
- Increase social ties in neighborhood (e.g. neighborhood block party).
- Establish physical infrastructure that builds connections through shared spaces.
- Increase participation in local meetings (PTA, Zoning meetings, etc.).
- Create virtuous cycles, e.g. community currencies to support volunteering.
- Use social media to support local resource sharing.



### Questions for Discussion

- Thinking about each type of social capital (Bonding, Bridging, Linking), how can you assess the current status in your community of each of these? What are some strategies to strengthen your community's social capital?
- Who are the leaders of organizations that build bridging capital that should be included in your planning process?
- Thinking about each type of social capital, how can you innovate to build social capital in our community?

### Discussion of Next Steps

Create a plan and timeline with your working group to:

- Revise preparedness plans to incorporate ways to build, maintain, and tap social capital.
- Conduct an outreach campaign to encourage local community and faith-based organizations to develop disaster response plans that support collective action.
- Consider innovative approaches to build neighbor and neighborhood connections, including block parties or a “10 last names” campaign to encourage people to meet their neighbors, set up neighborhood list servs, and hold meetings with the [Community Preparedness Toolkit](#).

- Identify social media platforms that encourage community connections and local resource sharing after a disaster.
- Encourage residents to sign up for local alert and warning systems and other social media platforms.
- Share stories from people in your community who have experienced disasters to showcase local stories about how social capital matters in disaster response and recovery.
- Build neighborhood and community identity and pride to increase the psychological connection to place and people.
- Strengthen emergency management related collaborative groups, and volunteer and training programs, including Citizen Corps Councils, Local Emergency Planning Committees, Community Emergency Response Teams, Medical Reserve Corps, Neighborhood Watch, and You Are the Help Until Help Arrives.
- Encourage workplaces, schools, faith-based organizations, and other groups to hold drills, discussion, and tabletop exercises for relevant hazards.
- Hold listening sessions with diverse groups of community members (bridging ties). The meeting summary of a National Disaster Resilience Roundtable held in Australia provides ideas for how to structure these meetings. Questions discussed included:
  - Thinking about each of the forms of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking – what are the formal and informal networks that we can tap into to raise awareness about hazards, and to encourage household preparedness?
  - Considering bonding, bridging and linking social capital, what strengths do people and communities bring into the disaster? How can this be drawn upon to meet people’s immediate safety and practical needs?
  - Considering the forms of social capital – bonding, bridging, and linking – what stressors are placed on a community’s social capital post disaster?
  - What is the impact of external aid (by that we mean funded or donated service support and assistance) in maintaining and building social capital post disaster?
  - What strengths do people who have been identified as ‘vulnerable’ in an emergency bring to the development of networks and relationships?
- Review [“Relationships matter: the application of social capital to disaster resilience.”](#) National Disaster Resilience Roundtable report, 2012, Melbourne Australia.”

*Social ties are the critical aspect of resilience.*

– Dr. Daniel Aldrich

*The core elements of recovery don’t come from outside the community or outside an organization, they come from inside it.*

– Dr. Daniel Aldrich

- Review FEMA’s publication “[A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes, and Pathways for Action](#),” especially the sections on Leverage and Strengthen Social Infrastructure, Networks, and Assets, pgs. 16-18, and Pathways for Action, pgs. 19-22.

For the companion Facilitator Slides and Resource List for this PrepTalk, visit:

<https://www.fema.gov/blog/preptalks-dr-daniel-aldrich-social-capital-disaster-mitigation-and-recovery>