

Defining and Measuring Social Capital for Young People

A Practical Review of the Literature on Resource-Full Relationships

This one-page brief summarizes a theoretically-informed framework for the measurement and improvement of social capital among young people. It supports a larger project known as Social Capital Assessment and Learning for Equity (SCALE), which focuses on developing and refining useful measures of social capital for programs designed to enhance postsecondary and employment opportunities for young people of color and from low-income backgrounds. A literature search on social capital, with an emphasis on practical measurement of social capital in programs serving youth and young adults was conducted. The review has led to four key conclusions:

1 Relationships and Resources Are Key to Defining Social Capital



There is little consensus on what social capital is and how it should be measured. The two most common elements of social capital are relationships and resources. It is through relationships that individuals or a collective group are able to access and mobilize valuable resources that contribute to positive outcomes.

2 Relationships Are Critical, Especially When They Are "Developmental"



The quality of relationships, how developmentally strong they are, is a key source of social capital for young people. The quality of these relationships, however, is often understudied. In order for programs to be successful in enhancing social capital, they need to provide regular opportunities for developmental relationships to form such as by connecting youth to new relationships and teaching skills and behaviors that enable young people to enhance their existing relationships.

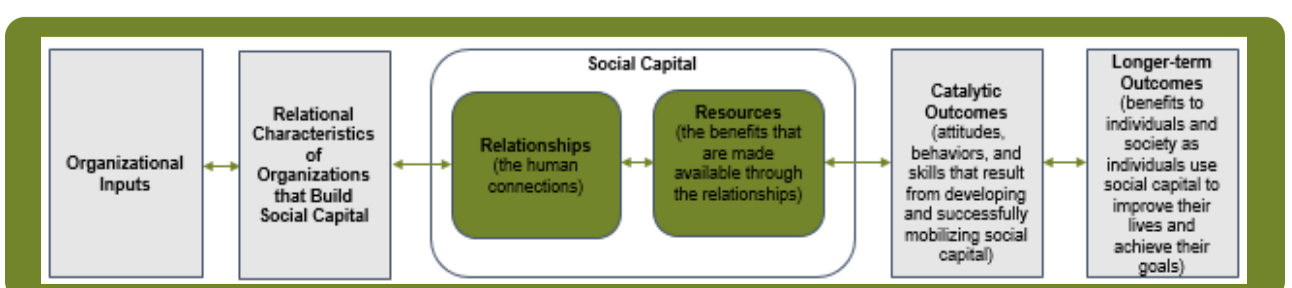
3 Social Capital Measurement Currently Has Little Consensus



Social capital has been measured in many ways, suggesting that there is no agreed-upon best method or any single instrument that captures all aspects of social capital. A review of common measures revealed that most measures do not capture both relationships and/or resources, most of the survey measures that do exist have not been tested for reliability or validity, and measures have not been specifically designed for organizations serving young people of color or from low-income backgrounds.

4 A Modular Approach Grounded in Measuring Relationships and Resources Advances the Field

Based on literature review findings, the model below was created to help guide and develop measures of social capital. It shows how organizations can create the conditions in which young people experience, plentiful, resource-rich developmental relationships. These relationships contribute to positive catalytic outcomes and ultimately, to longer-term outcomes such as educational and occupational success. Organizations will vary in which parts of the model they emphasize in programs and measurement. This model will help lead to the development of social capital measures.



See the Full Report at <https://www.search-institute.org/social-capital>