“It Was a Support Network System that Made Me Believe in Myself”

Understanding Youth and Young Adults’ Experiences of Social Capital in Six Innovative Programs

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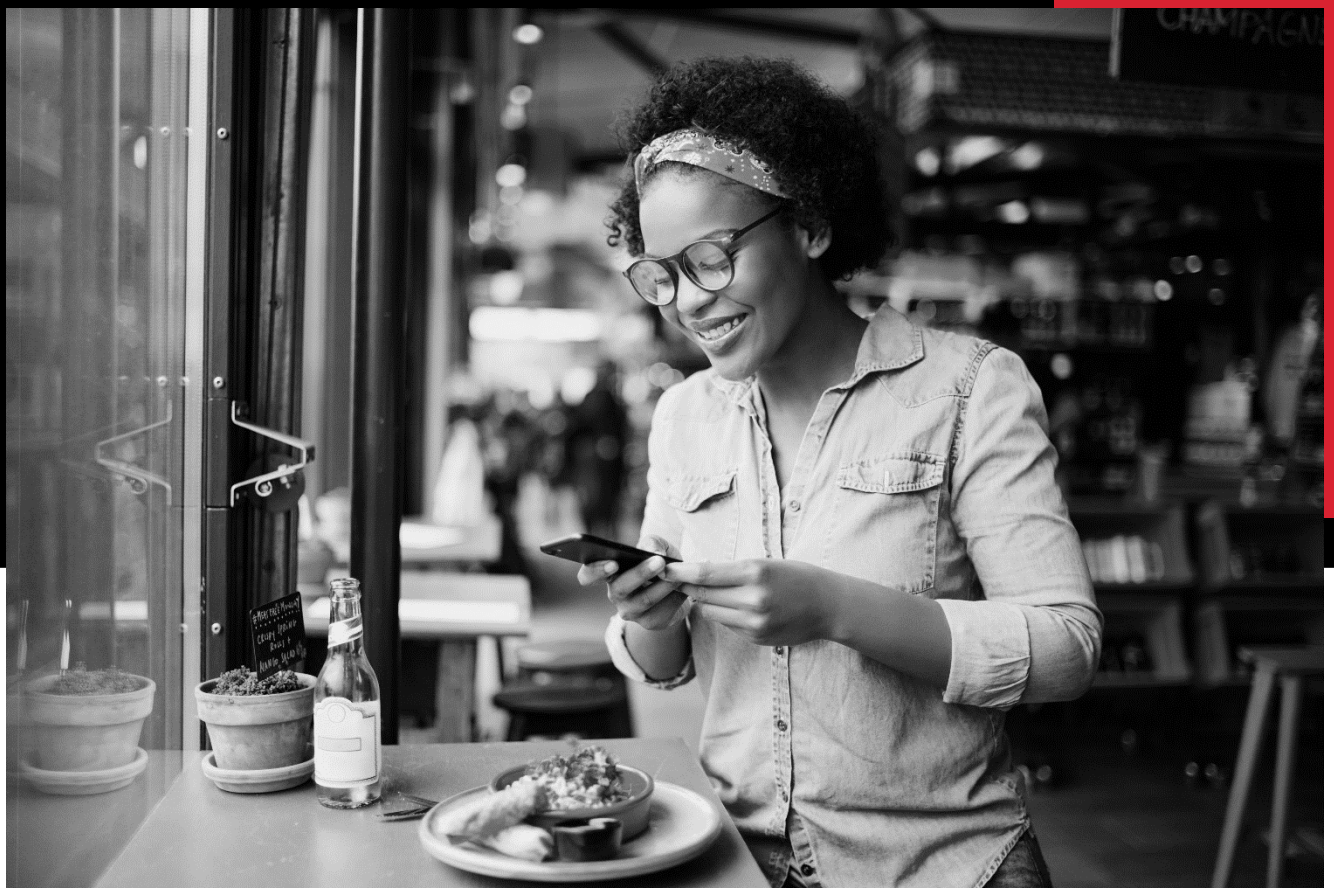

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Search Institute

Search Institute is a nonprofit organization that partners with schools, youth programs, and other organizations to conduct and apply research that promotes positive youth development and equity.

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Executive Summary

Understanding Youth and Young Adults' Experiences of Social Capital in Six Innovative Programs.

With support from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Search Institute partnered with six youth and young-adult serving organizations (BASTA, Beyond 12, Braven, Climb Hire, COOP, and nXu) to better understand how social capital and strong peer-to-peer networks help youth and young adults secure education and employment opportunities.

Search Institute conducted focus groups with the six organizations to elicit knowledge about (1) barriers that get in the way of young people reaching their education or career goals, (2) the key relationships needed for helping young people reach their goals, (3) the type of resources and support these relationships provided, and (4) how participants personally changed while also building social capital over the course of their programs. The report describes the qualitative themes that emerged from these focus groups and provides recommendations for social capital measurement based on qualitative findings.

Summary of Qualitative Themes

Barriers to Success

Participants across programs shared the very real barriers they have faced to achieving success in their education and career goals. Participants described experiencing barriers such as financial strain; difficulty of trying to work full time, go to school, and take care of people in their family; and experiences of discrimination and microaggressions based on race, gender, sexuality, language, socioeconomic status, and immigrant status.

Empowering Young People to Build Social Capital

Participants described how programs created a sense of emotional safety, which empowered participants to explore and expand personal identities. Participants also shared how programs gave them opportunities for skill development and helped them intentionally build relationships and expand their social networks. Participants described using the skills and connections they gained in their programs to serve as a resource to other young people in their communities.

Providing New Connections and Networks

There were two principle ways that participants built connections and networks through the programs: 1) through an instant network of their peers within the program and 2) through the programs' already established connections with volunteers, employers, and other industries.

Developmental Relationships as a Foundation for Social Capital

Through the partner programs, participants experienced developmental relationships with peers and program staff that were characterized by expressing care, providing support, sharing power, challenging growth, and expanding possibilities.

Exploring the Impact of Program Experiences

The program characteristics along with the high-quality relationships participants

experienced were central to participants' personal growth across multiple areas. Participants shared how they experienced greater self-confidence, a clearer vision and plan for the future, the development of networking skills, and ultimately, strengthened social capital.

Measurement Recommendations

Good measurement is essential for understanding how programs broaden and promote participants' social capital development. Based on the qualitative findings, the report makes the following recommendations for improving social capital measurement:

1. Measure the multidimensional nature of social capital
2. Capture perceptions of network strength
3. Map relationships
4. Track other outcomes and skills aligned with accessing and mobilizing social networks
5. Assess social capital over time

The findings from the following report show that programs that foster social capital are one promising avenue for helping youth and young adults reach their full potential and life goals. It is imperative to provide these programs and the broader field with good tools for measuring social capital so they can continue to track, assess, and monitor the important impact they are having on the lives of their program participants.

Introduction

All youth and young adults need and benefit from positive, developmental relationships. Relationships promote social capital by connecting young people to valuable resources and opportunities that are needed to achieve education and career success. Due to a range of structural barriers including racism and discrimination, social capital that advances success in postsecondary education and careers is often not equitably distributed among young people of color and young people from low-income backgrounds. This inequity in the lives of some young people has led to the development of several promising programs designed to increase education- and occupational-relevant social capital.

With support from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Search Institute partnered with six youth and young-adult serving organizations (BASTA, Beyond 12, Braven, Climb Hire, COOP, and nXu) to better understand how social capital and strong peer-to-peer networks help youth and young adults secure education and employment opportunities. As each of these partners continue to engage in this important work, there has been an increased desire for measurement tools that can be used to accurately assess program participants' social capital. This is an important contribution to this field, as the increased use of validated measures will be essential for continuing to promote and strengthen social capital among young people.

The following report introduces the six partner organizations and how their program models promote participants' social capital. Focus groups were conducted and used to show how participants experience peer relationships and social capital within their programs. A summary of program partners' current social capital measurement strategies is provided along with recommendations for social capital measurement based on qualitative findings. Findings from this qualitative report will subsequently be used by Search Institute to inform the development of quantitative measures of the quality of relationships, social capital, and the strength of social networks among program participants.

Six Innovative Partner Programs

The missions of each of the six partner organizations that participated in helping to inform this report are described below:

BASTA

BASTA launched in 2016 in the New York area. Their mission is to create a bridge of opportunity between employers and first-generation college goers of color to increase knowledge and workforce diversity at all levels.

Beyond 12

Beyond 12 launched in 2010 and is a national program. Their mission is to dramatically increase the number of low-income, first-generation, and historically underrepresented students who graduate from college.

Braven

Braven launched in 2013. Their mission is to empower promising, underrepresented young people – first-generation college students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students of color – with the skills, confidence, experiences and networks necessary to obtain strong first jobs after college, leading to meaningful careers and lives of impact.

Climb Hire

Climb Hire launched in 2019 in the San Francisco Bay Area. Their mission is to create economic opportunities for young adults from economically disadvantaged communities by training working adults for in-demand Salesforce administrator roles.

COOP

COOP launched in 2014 and serves underrepresented graduates from The City University of New York and California State systems. Their mission is to overcome underemployment through digital skills and peer connections.

nXu

nXu launched in 2017 and serves youth and adults across a large number of states. Their mission is to catalyze and equip youth and adults to explore, articulate, and pursue their purpose.

Innovative Models for Building Youth and Young Adults' Social Capital

A common goal across all six partner organizations is to strengthen existing relationships and broaden social networks among program participants to promote education and/or career success. Each partner organization has developed peer-cohort and/or near-peer program models that explicitly help program participants develop relationships and build their personal and professional networks.

Peer-Cohort Model

Most of the partner organizations were designed to operate using a peer-cohort model that brings young people or young adults together either through face-to-face or virtual programming. This model provides new peer connections while also including opportunities for program participants to strengthen relationships with peers through group work and activities that promote a sense of community and belonging. A peer-cohort model can also be an opportunity to connect peers who may not otherwise have formed a connection with one another outside of the program. For example, some of the programs intentionally bring together program participants from diverse backgrounds (e.g., socioeconomic, education, race/ethnicity) to help broaden and diversify peer networks.

Near-Peer Model

Each of the programs has a near peer or a key program staff member who serves in the form of a mentor or coach while providing ongoing support and access to valuable resources. Near peers are individuals that are typically close in age to program participants or have recently gone through a similar experience as the participant (e.g., graduate of the program, recently secured employment, recent college graduate).

Near Peers and Key Program Staff

Career Success Managers	BASTA provides program participants with a Career Success Manager. Career Success Managers are staff members who serve as coaches and provide program participants with weekly group support calls (e.g., interview prep, LinkedIn support) and ongoing one-on-one support throughout the entire job search process.
College Coaches	Beyond12 assigns students a coach (recent college graduates) who provide ongoing support to students from the end of high school through sophomore year of college. Coaches connect with students virtually through students' preferred mode of communication and work to forge trusting one-on-one mentoring relationships by providing support and encouraging students to connect with on-campus supports (e.g., staff, health services, academic support services, affinity groups).

Leadership Coach	Braven Accelerator courses are facilitated by Leadership Coaches. Leadership Coaches are trained volunteers who guide and motivate a small group of program participants (5-8 college students) weekly using Braven's curriculum. Leadership Coaches also work with program participants individually to help them design their career vision, goals, and roadmap.
Fellows	Climb Hire fellows (alumni of the program) serve as mentors and teachers to current program participants, which provides extra connection and an ongoing layer of support. Climb Hire also hopes to have alumni co-own the organization as a cooperative and encourages alumni to "pay it forward" by paying for new program participants once they themselves have successfully secured employment.
Captains	COOP assigns all cohorts four part-time, near-peer coaches known as captains (alumni of the program). The four captains work together to guide cohorts through 200 hours of curriculum while holding program participants accountable for their progress and providing regular check-ins to provide individual support throughout the program.
Compass Coaches	All of nXu's direct student programming is facilitated by a Compass Coach (i.e., experienced facilitator). Compass Coaches guide students through reflective community and relationship building activities that foster a sense of purpose and that also very intentionally expand, deepen, and diversity peer connections and networks.

In Their Own Words: Participants Share their Experiences of Building Social Capital

To better understand how youth and young adults experience relationships and social capital within the six partner programs, focus groups were conducted. The focus groups were designed to elicit knowledge about (1) barriers and challenges that get in the way of young people reaching their education or career goals, (2) the key relationships needed for helping young people reach their goals, (3) the type of resources and support these relationships provided, and (4) how participants personally changed while also building social capital over the course of their programs.

Methods

Four focus groups were conducted with each of the six partners. For each program, this included one focus group with staff, one focus group with alumni (i.e., past program participants), and two focus groups with current program participants. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, all focus groups were conducted virtually using the online platform Zoom. Focus groups were facilitated by two researchers from Search Institute. Staff volunteered to participate in the focus groups. Alumni and current program participants were recruited by program staff, who identified a sample of individuals who were available and willing to participate. All participants received an electronic gift card to thank them for their time.

Participants

A total of 74 individuals participated in the focus groups, including 24 staff members, 17 alumni, and 33 current program participants. As part of the focus groups, individuals were asked to voluntarily self-identify their age, gender, and race/ethnicity by completing a brief online survey. Sixty-eight individuals chose to provide some or all of this information. Ages ranged from 15 to 51. Forty-two individuals identified as female, twenty-five as male, and one as non-binary. Twenty-one individuals identified as Hispanic or Latinx. Twenty-four individuals identified as Black, African American, or African; fourteen as Asian or Pacific Islander; nine as White; and five as biracial or multiracial. Others self-described as East Indian, Filipino, Puerto Rican, Punjabi, and Native American or Alaskan Native. Twelve individuals chose not to answer.

Throughout this report, we use “participant” and “program participant” to refer to people currently enrolled in a program. “Staff” or “program staff” refers to program leaders and facilitators. Programs also involved recent alumni and staff members who serve as mentors and go by titles such as “coaches,” “fellows,” or “captains.” In this report we refer to them as “near peers.”

Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data used a grounded theory and thematic analysis approach, facilitated by NVivo software (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Charmaz, 2008). All focus groups were recorded and transcribed. After an initial codebook was developed in NVivo, three researchers separately coded the same focus group transcript from the data set. They then came together and discussed the codebook, refining coding norms. After the initial coding and codebook refinement process, four researchers coded a set of additional focus group transcripts, again checking for alignment and refining the codebook. The remaining transcripts were coded using the refined codebook. Throughout the coding process, all researchers created memos (Shenton, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2013) to document the coding process, emerging themes, and questions. After all focus groups were coded, the research team identified themes in the data. The themes generated from the focus groups are described below, accompanied by illustrative quotes.

Findings

Social capital is conceptualized as the resources that arise from a web of relationships, which young people can access and mobilize to help them improve their lives and achieve their goals (Scales et al., 2020). Relationship-rich organizations have the potential to promote educational- and occupational-relevant social capital by connecting youth and young adults to valuable knowledge, skills, and opportunities. While most youth- and young adult-serving programs agree that building quality relationships and equitable social capital among their program participants is important, many programs are not actively measuring these constructs. The six partner programs engaged in this important work, however, are not only purposefully building young people's social capital but also seeking ways to effectively measure social capital.

Effective measurement will inform program improvements that can further support young people's social capital development and life success. A comprehensive review of the literature revealed that there are multiple dimensions of relationships and social capital that can be explored and assessed to better understand how social capital is built and changes over time (Scales et al., 2020). Although social capital is a multidimensional construct that has been conceptualized in many ways, at its core it consists of two interlocking components: *relationships* and the *resources* that are provided by and through these relationships. The following findings illustrate how the power of relationships and the resources they provide empower youth and young adults to build their social networks and capital in order to reach their life goals. These findings are the first step in understanding the experiences of program participants and will inform the future development of social capital measures that resonate with participants' experiences and are informative to the broader field.

Barriers to Success

Participants across programs shared the very real barriers they have faced to achieving success in their education and career goals. Many experienced financial strain, have struggled to pay rent, pay for tuition, or find stable housing. Participants explained the difficulty of trying to work full time, go to school, and take care of people in their family. Opportunities like unpaid internships which often help young people begin building their resumes were not an option. As one participant mentioned, "...[internships] are inherently inequitable because that caters to the people who are able to study exclusively and inevitably, those folks will have much higher GPAs and the flexibility to take an internship and the ability to do research, when a lot of the folks in underrepresented communities don't have those luxuries." Others explained they didn't have parents who could use their privilege to get them a job.

Participants shared their struggles in the job market which is now only exacerbated by the pandemic. As one participant said, "the job market is in a state of panic." Others shared that due to a lack of opportunities they began to experience "imposter syndrome" when applying for jobs, feeling unqualified, judged, and rejected; "...sometimes, when you're getting an entry-level job, you kinda feel like you're alone, like you're the problem, or your accomplishments aren't big enough." Participants experienced discrimination based on their race, gender, sexuality, language, socioeconomic, and immigrant status. They experienced microaggressions through having their "intelligence questioned," being told "you're not a good fit," "don't look 'right' for the company" or as one participant said, "all the institutional things that hold people back." Black participants talked about agonizing over how to wear their hair for interviews or LinkedIn headshots knowing that certain corporations may deem them "not presentable." Some said they knew "their name alone" was enough to deter a company from hiring them. They shared that they were never told about certain careers because as one participant said, "for underrepresented groups, they're just not presented as options."

Participants of color were frustrated that they couldn't see themselves represented in academia or in careers they wanted because there were very few (or no) people of color in those positions. First-generation college students talked about the difficulty of navigating a complex system and the frustration of not getting the support or help they needed from their high school: "Most of the Asian or Caucasian kids...who go to the nice public schools, they often get pushed forward, or they get more resources to do what they need to do, in order to get to college, and they get better advising and counseling." Even young people that do find ways to navigate higher education and graduate aren't "guaranteed a livable wage."

> *"It's all of the 'isms' of society that manifest in small ways and are disproportionately felt by marginalized groups.*
>
> *- Program participant*

Empowering Young People and Building Social Capital

The overarching ethos guiding the program partners is that the youth and young adults are already capable of success. They do not have a deficit-based view of their participants, rather, they assume participants just need the space and support to develop their skills and networks to achieve their goals. As one program staff noted, "...we...believe our students are created resourceful and whole." It's important to note that because of the diversity of staff leading these programs, participants could "see themselves" in that leadership and imagine broader success for their own lives. As one participant said, "A lot of times, people

from minorities, they don't get to see themselves represented in the roles they want, so that's really impactful for me, personally." The following section further unpacks how programs support social capital development by providing an emotionally safe environment, empowering participants to better understand themselves, build their networks while supporting a community of their peers for success, and instilling a value of "paying it forward."

Creating Emotional Safety

Communities of safety, inclusivity, and nonjudgmental support grew from programs' relational efforts with cohorts. The strong bonds created through relationships were instrumental in creating space for program participants to feel safe, be open in having difficult conversations with each other, and feel as though they would not be judged for what they shared or who they were.

> *"I want them to know that... they're strong enough and they belong in every community and every room they step into, and they deserve a seat at every table they sit at.*
>
> *- Program staff*

For several programs, it was just as important that participants found a sense of purpose and opened their minds to critical thinking about the world as it was to build technical skills. One staff member noted that, "We've got to create an environment where kids feel safe and connected," explicating how supporting young people's emotional safety allowed for them to "get the maximum experience with the content." Participants were given safe environments to have difficult conversations that allowed them to feel heard and learn from each other. As one near peer shared, "I love affirmations, they know I love discussing mental health with them, and being able to hold space for that conversation."

Participants who experienced significant barriers in their path to skilled employment were appreciative of the opportunity to be vulnerable together. They experienced a "space...to let it all out, and if anyone shares anything sensitive, no one makes you feel weird about it or anything like that." Many of the activities within programs were intentionally designed to encourage confidentiality and acceptance among participants for the sake of opening up. For some programs, this happened quickly. One participant shared that "within the first ten hours of the program, [it] created a safe space enough to share that level of detail."

Space to Explore Identity and Interests

Participants across programs experienced opportunities to reflect on their identity and interests. They explained how staff helped them "get to the root" of *what* they wanted to do with their lives and *why* they wanted to do it. Staff helped participants "figure out what type of person you are" and "explore your goals and purpose." They did this through individual and group reflection activities and discussions often geared towards participants better understanding themselves through conversations with their peers. These activities helped participants focus on their strengths, passions, purpose, and what they "really enjoy doing" while connecting those ideas to career choices.

Participants talked about being asked to "tell their authentic story" and how staff helped them see the power in sharing their story with others. Staff noted they utilized a variety of concepts in their curriculum to get participants thinking about their future including asking "curious questions," going on "possibility walks," and even providing guided meditations.

Space to Explore Systemic Issues

Programs not only provided space for identity development in terms of education and career aspirations, but also provided space to intentionally explore how other identities (racial/ethnic, gender, ability, etc.) were integral to participants' experiences with systemic issues. Because of the safe environment programs created, participants were able to talk about the barriers they have and will face in higher education and workplace environments. As part of self exploration, many participants shared that they appreciated how staff in their programs encouraged candid conversations about racism and microaggressions. One participant said "...the exercises we do... on work culture, racism, anything that you can think of, we've discussed and I think it's amazing." Another participant noted that most of the time in life they can't talk about "racism and socioeconomic stuff" but in their program "it actually is talked about, and it's really important to get discussion going and for people to share."

A few participants also appreciated how staff members faced similar barriers, and were open to sharing their experiences and having difficult conversations about inequities. One participant shared that "my coach made me feel like she knew what I was going through." Another said, "She's also a lot like me. She's a Black woman and she's twenty-something, and it's really easy to talk to her." One staff member discussed how it was important for participants to find someone "they identify with" to address barriers they face. Participants also appreciated when they were able to talk with staff and alumni about what to expect as they entered post-secondary institutions or began to build their careers:

> *...we're planning to go into a predominantly white space, so having this experience of people of color who have made it in this space, what their day-to-day looks like, how they're working to make a name for themselves, how they're working with microaggressions...so I think the aspect of diversity is intrinsic to [this program], cause without it, it's just another program, like a skill-building program, but since we're all trying to get ourselves into spaces where we aren't, it's more of a thing.*
>
> *- Program participant*

Program staff explained how their program content intentionally "...activates [participants] in thinking about their identity" and said that it was important to them to share things about "dominant culture" with participants so they would have a "choice about how you want to go into this situation." Staff often see the work they do with participants as going beyond preparing them for the workplace and higher education. As one staff member noted, "I think the internal work that we try to do with people around self-exploration and appreciation is absolutely foundational, not only for the purpose work we're trying to do, but for them to just navigate life as a human being..."

Sharing Information and Creating Opportunities to Practice Skills in a Supportive Environment

Participants received valuable information and skill-building opportunities. Across programs, they were introduced to technology platforms such as Zoom, Slack, LinkedIn, Google Suite, and Salesforce. They learned how to use these tools to communicate with their peers in the program and to begin building their networks outside their programs. One participant mentioned that their program, "taught me how to properly utilize my LinkedIn and the importance of the types of connections you have on there."

They had opportunities to work on communication skills including how to ask helpful questions when applying for jobs, send professional emails, negotiate salaries, practice public speaking, deal with conflict, build connections online, and create an "elevator pitch." Participants were given resume and cover letter support as well as opportunities to practice "mock interviews." One participant noted that their program would do an "information dump" so that the participant could talk about all their past work experience. Through that exercise they often realized what was worth keeping on their resume and important pieces that may have been left out. Another said, "[now] we know the tips and tricks of what it looks like to interview at this [company]."

Participants appreciated building planning and time management skills. Through an array of different tools, participants learned to create budgets, timelines, and to become more organized. Some had to share their weekly plans; "...we give our commitments, what we're planning for the week about 'hey I'm planning on applying to this company or that company.'" They also gained exposure to a variety of industry-specific skills based on their interests.

> *"And that's where I see the turning point for my life, because it put me into contact with a lot of different people.*
>
> *- Program participant*

Providing New Connections and Networks

There are two principle ways that participants built connections and networks through the programs in this study: 1) through an instant network of their peers within the program and 2) through their program's already established connections with volunteers, employers, and other industries.

The Power of Peer Connections

Participants gained an instant network of their peers by joining the partner programs. Participants from one program talked about being asked to add everyone in their cohort to the LinkedIn page right away to begin establishing their own network. Others noted that being able to add their peers to their network made networking less elusive and more "tangible." Participants appreciated both that their peer cohorts were racially and ethnically diverse and that they were uniquely supportive of that diversity: "Everyone in my cohort is a person of color, and it's cool to work in and be like, 'Hey, we're all here,' instead of just being in a predominantly white space." Another noted:

> *..in my neighborhood, in my borough, in my school, I'm surrounded with people that look like me and I don't really go downtown that much and talk to people from other cultures. And it's just a good environment to be in, because you learn that, even though you may come from a different background, you guys still have something in common.*
>
> *- Program participant*

For participants of color, it was an important bonding experience to share some commonalities, yet connect with people from very different backgrounds. For the few White participants, being part of these diverse cohorts was important to them as well. One White-identifying participant said that hearing the stories of their peers of color was an important experience to becoming an ally and fighting discrimination; "...being someone that is White, I can't just be a passive person while this goes on, if I ever see this in action, it's not enough to just not be a part of it. You need to become and intervene."

Beyond a diverse network of personal and emotional support, peers helped each other get a "leg up" through sharing their experiences in the job market. As one program staff mentioned, "...these participants that get a job can then extend the help to their peers who might not have a job yet, and say, 'Oh, here's what I did in my interview, here's what I think worked, here's what they told me worked.'" Participants talked about how their peers could now be a reference or provide a recommendation for a program or job application.

The Power of Sharing Established Ties

Programs often acted as "brokers" of professional connections in the fields that participants were interested in. They had built social capital in order to share it with their program participants. This was established through the program as a whole, but also through each individual staff member bringing their own networks to the table. Program staff set up multiple ways for participants to benefit from already established relationships and they also instilled networking as a value within their programs. They sought to make "networking accessible." One way programs did this was through holding networking or "social capital events" where participants would have the opportunity to meet program alumni in their field, employers, and industry leaders. As one participant noted, they appreciated the "....social capital events that they would provide us with... giving us those opportunities to make connections with these certain people, to move from there."

Staff explained that they wanted to give program participants many opportunities to "put things into practice" and that providing networking opportunities for participants to tell their story, ask questions of potential employers, and make new connections for their expanding networks was central to their goals. Before these events, staff would often prepare participants by helping them think through the kinds of connections they wanted to make (quality v. quantity), how to reach out, build meaningful relationships, and ultimately sustain the connections they made into the future.

> *"Those inside connections with employers is a benefit of being part of the program...*
>
> *- Program participant*

Additionally, staff in programs consistently talked to participants about their interests and goals and connected them with job interviews and potential employers related to those goals. As one staff participant said, "I ask them what kind of jobs they're looking for, so when I connect with our partnerships team, they let me know what kind of jobs are coming up." One participant noted a staff member helped them set up a GoFundMe page and shared it with their network. They said, "I was getting donations from other people I'd never met before. It also helped me financially and created a sense of networking, because now I'm able to communicate with other people and be able to have opportunities that I've never gotten before." Another said, "I think [the program] did a very good job of finding advocates for us, like in these companies that were accepting and encouraging of first generation

college students, or people from diverse backgrounds." Others appreciated that their program strove to connect them with companies that were "positive" and "not discriminatory."

Participants noted that just being part of these programs and making that visible to potential employers was an advantage. One participant described how having their program's logo on their LinkedIn page helped get their resume to the "top of the stack." Another noted they used to send out dozens of resumes without a second glance and now they are getting regular interviews. The strong relationships programs had established with companies and organizations ensured their participants would not be overlooked and often "expedited through the interview process."

> *"Let's give this population … who is systematically oppressed, the opportunity to rub elbows with people who can give them the social capital.*
>
> *- Program staff*

As noted earlier, each of the programs in this study employs a "near peer" component that augments the role of staff in helping participants establish connections and networks. These near peers who are either recent alumni of the program, coaches for the incoming cohort, or volunteers, play a critical, yet different role than peers. They are out in the workforce navigating jobs and they dedicate their time to supporting program participants by connecting them with industry professionals, knowledge, and skills. They are a foundational part of the social capital participants are able to build in a relatively short amount of time. As one participant said:

> *I think it's just the way that the coaches [near peer] can connect the fellows with people, preferably in their industry, to have these informational talks.*
>
> *- Program participant*

Programs Instill the Value of "Paying it Forward"

Program participants described how they felt motivated to "pay it forward" by using the skills and knowledge they gained in their programs to help others: "It's pretty empowering, cause now, we have this knowledge and you have all the advice and everything they gave you… you can be that person [to others]." Some participants even noted how they now serve as a resource for their community: "So, I know after college, or even during college, my mom would send everyone's kids my way… I feel like I'm able to be a resource for my community now." Staff also shared how they see program participants taking the skills they learn in the program and using them to benefit others: "…he takes those skills and does the same thing I'm doing, but for other people."

Due to the mentorship and modeling that near peers and program staff provided, many participants felt that they learned how to advocate for others that need help or assistance: "So, I think that's something that my coaches have taught me, is being more proactive and advocating for people that… being a helping hand for anybody that might need guidance through college or getting there." An alumni shared how current participants started to reach out to them on LinkedIn and they thought, "Wow, they're reaching out to me because they

think I can help them, and I'm gonna do my best to help them." Another participant noted that their mindset had shifted from "what's in it for me?" to "let's help each other out."

It is evident that many former participants valued "paying it forward" as they came back and joined as staff, volunteers, and/or mentors to incoming participants. The hope of many of the programs is that this mentality will continue to expand among program participants and beyond, across education and employment pathways: "The vision is that they will provide each other with more connections and help one another more and more, as they continue to gain a little more ability to do that in the workplace." In reality, the willingness of others to "pay it forward" often results in participants securing jobs and other life opportunities: "...there was a fellow peer of ours who has a job now, because of another program participant who helped him."

> *"I want to help all first generation college students, I wanna help anybody who feels the way that I once felt.*
>
> *- Program participant*

Developmental Relationships as a Foundation for Social Capital

It is evident that relationships cultivated within partner programs were an integral part of building participants' social capital. The relationships program participants developed with peers, near peers, alumni, and staff were the foundation they needed to strengthen and broaden their existing social networks. These high-quality relationships are a key dimension of social capital (Charania & Freeland Fisher, 2020).

Search Institute has been conducting research on the kinds of relationships that empower young people to "discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to contribute to the world around them." These relationships are composed of five key elements: Express Care, Challenge Growth, Provide Support, Share Power, and Expand Possibilities. The five elements make up what Search Institute has named the Developmental Relationships Framework (see appendix for full description of framework). When youth and young adults from diverse backgrounds experience these qualities in their relationships with adults and peers, they report higher levels of wellbeing across a number of important youth outcomes (Pekel et al., 2018; Scales et al., 2019).

Search Institute has conducted research on developmental relationships in a variety of youth development settings, including schools, faith communities, and out-of-school-time programs. Findings from the focus groups in this study helped identify unique features of developmental relationships in the context of the six innovative partner programs that support building youth and young adults' social capital and propelling their progress towards educational or career goals. While in the previous section we identified several supportive and relational aspects of the programs overall, in this section, we dive deeper into how participants specifically experienced developmental relationships with peers and staff.

Express Care

Participants experienced care through non-judgmental peers who provided encouragement and a space to talk about program-related and personal topics. They connected and built trust by checking in with one another. They encouraged their peers to seek opportunities for themselves and cheered for each other's successes. They talked about being happy for those who found a job and reassured each other when they faced setbacks. One participant described how a peer in their cohort helped them stay motivated by saying "...we're in this together, so we're gonna get through it together." This kind of encouragement was also evident with near peers, who one participant referred to as "your number one supporters, and just people who root for you all the time."

> *"I just like the people in my cohort.*
>
> *- Program participant*

Participants described staff as expressing care by being "really friendly," "just so nice," "very warm" and "there unconditionally." Participants noted how staff members "checked in" on them and shared their own struggles that they had gone through, which made them feel "not alone" and "created this kinship off the bat." A staff member explained,

> *I start relationship building with stories, allowing students to see me as an extension of them. From my own college or life experiences, or just coming from multiple underrepresented populations, for example, being an immigrant, being African American, being a woman. So, I think a lot of my connection and relationship building comes from storytelling.*
>
> *- Program staff*

Challenge Growth

Participants appreciated how their fellow program members helped them stay on track with tasks, assignments, and goals. One described a peer in their program as "a person that really pushes me to do better each and every day." In two programs, participants talked about having "accountability buddies," assigned or chosen peers who checked each other's progress. Seeing peers participating in the programs also helped motivate participants: "Having other people around you and seeing them actually think hard, it motivates you to actually want to do it with them."

Staff pushed participants by holding them accountable: when participants had not done homework, one remembered, "they were real with us and told us, 'This can't happen.' It was really nice to see how real they got in that moment." Other ways staff challenged growth included pushing participants "to ask for help," and "to know that you can do whatever you put your mind to." One participant appreciated the feedback a near peer provided on their resume: "She will give it to me straight and make me rewrite things."

Provide Support

Instead of competing with one another, participants talked about sharing insider information with each other as they navigated the job search or education process. A staff member explained, "these participants that get a job can then extend the help to their peers who might not have a job yet, and say, 'Oh, here's what I did in my interview, here's what I think worked…'" Participants would also let each other know what to expect in a workplace, especially as many hold identities that are under-represented or marginalized in the workplaces they enter. One shared, "they warn us about racism, so they let us know that it's there…they make sure that we're aware of it." Another explained, "we look towards our peers for support for anything, whether it be racism or just any problems that arise, we always have our peers to help us."

Participants appreciated that staff often provided useful feedback and personalized support, which helped one participant "find my purpose and get on the right path" and another "really narrow down what I want to do." A staff member explained that "the different ways we help or work with the participants to really understand what it is that is unique to that individual job searcher, I think it…cultivates that connection."

> *"My peers were definitely one of my biggest support systems throughout my program experience.*
>
> *- Program participant*

Share Power

Participants talked about creating shared expectations or "group norms" together with peers and staff which engaged all members of the group to collaboratively shape how they wanted to interact with one another throughout their time in the program: They respected each other's different backgrounds and found commonality. One participant explained that "being surrounded by like-minded peers that all come from such diverse backgrounds and have different goals and aspirations in life, it really motivates me." Others explained, "despite those diverse backgrounds, we all come together," and "we've learned what we have in common are dreams and what motivates us."

Some staff shared power by seeking out and responding to feedback from participants: "I've literally seen stuff that I've written on the feedback survey just be implemented the next time." As one staff member said, "They know that, whatever they say is gonna be respected, and I think that opens up just this innate capacity to connect." Participants felt that their programs really gave them a sense of agency over their experience:

> *I've received feedback from fellows like, "This is the first class where I got to call the shots, and it felt really good for me to say, 'I want to do this and now that.'"*
>
> *- Program participant*

Expand Possibilities

Much of what the partner programs are built on philosophically overlaps with the relational actions of expanding possibilities. Participants expanded possibilities by exposing one another to new ideas:

> *I learned so much from having those conversations with my fellow [program] peers…I think that's always been really interesting. Just the overlaps that we might have and the differences in what they talk about and me being able to learn about a different industry and be like, "That might be interesting to look into one day."*
>
> *- Program participant*

Participants also shared education and job opportunities with each other. This included providing referrals, sending each other job postings, and inviting one another to networking events. Staff encouraged participants to think about "… different ideas and different things you want to do in the future." Another shared that a staff member "helped me identify other career jobs… and also opened my eyes up to different positions that are relevant to my interests." A participant explained that one staff member was "always sending me jobs that she thinks are up my alley."

> *"This program introduced me to the idea of social capital.*
>
> *- Program participant*

As part of networking building and expanding possibilities, staff introduced participants to people with who they may not have otherwise interacted with. Participants shared numerous examples of staff members connecting them with "potential mentors and professionals with experience," "companies for jobs," "other people that were doing things that I wanted to do," "LinkedIn contacts," and more, so that they could expand their interests and connections.

"I've Seen the Biggest Growth for Myself Knowing there are People Behind Me": Exploring the Impact of Program Experiences

The social capital that participants built in their programs through developmental relationships and program resources led to profound personal growth. The next section highlights the critical ways participants described how they have changed over the course of their programs. Participants experienced greater confidence, a clearer purpose and plan for future life goals, developed networking skills, and strengthened their social networks.

> *When it comes to the transformation, my students are the ones that are doing that completely. They are making the decision to work on these really difficult things that we talk about in our calls and follow through on them, and that's really what's changing things for them.*
>
> *- Program staff*

Greater Self Confidence and Ability to Network

Program participants and staff commonly described the increased confidence that participants developed over the course of their programs. Participants noted how they believed in themselves and their own capabilities to meet their life goals. Participants no longer felt nervous sharing the challenges that they had overcome, their past achievements, or their life goals. Simply put, young people felt confident in being their "authentic selves," "sharing their story," and letting people see who they really are. One participant described how being a part of their program helped them begin to view their past experiences as assets to future organizations and companies: "I can tell my story in a way that people just don't feel bad, but they realize how much I've overcome and how much I can contribute, if I was in their company."

Participants began to see their "value add" through experiences in their programs and realized that they had much to offer an employer or school: "It really brought up my confidence. I feel like I was working towards that, by joining clubs at school, but [the program] helped me really see all the experience that I had." This increased confidence was essential to participants' future life success, as many shared how they felt more empowered and motivated to work towards goals and opportunities that they may not have otherwise. One explained:

> *"I think my confidence has gone up a few notches.*
>
> *- Program participant*

> *You could have a million connections on LinkedIn, you could do a million interview practice, but until you believe in yourself and you give yourself that shot, all of that will be a waste.I think for me, personally, it's getting the confidence to just apply. If I see a job I like, I'm gonna apply, I'm not gonna take myself out of the game, so to speak.*
>
> *- Program participant*

Participants also began to feel more confident in their ability to network: "Being able to create those connections in the first place, of feeling comfortable enough, whether it's in-person or online to talk to people, and not get so in your head about it." As participants continued to gain opportunities to practice their relationship building and networking skills within their programs, they also began to feel "more comfortable reaching out to people that are not in [their] network." Some participants gained confidence to reach out to people outside of their network simply because of the affiliation with their program: "having the [program name] background has helped me be more comfortable reaching out to people that are not in my network."

Clearer Vision, Plan, and Purpose for the Future

Program participants felt that through their programs they developed a clearer vision, plan, and purpose for their future. Participants described having "a more fine path" and feeling "more hopeful" about their future plans. One participant described how being in their program really helped "reevaluate your mission, your purpose, and where you

wanna go." Another participant shared how without their program, they would not know how to purposefully apply for a job: "I probably would've gone with just blindly sending applications left and right."

Through intentional processing, participants were able to question what they really wanted to get out of life and where they hoped to land in the future: "You also find yourself along the way, so you start identifying, 'Hey, do I really want to do this? Is this what I want to do for a career? Should I look for something else?'" These tough questions often led to participants feeling that they had a clearer course of action towards their goals.

Gained Networking Skills

Program participants described an array of newly acquired skills related to networking including how to conduct "cold calls," craft emails, and write thank you notes and "follow up." Participants also learned how to strategically reach out and make connections with potential recruiters and organizations via social media platforms such as LinkedIn:

> *Someone would connect with me or they would like my article that I wrote and posted on LinkedIn, and I would look at their profile and see if they're a recruiter or if they worked for some company that I like and I would hope to work for, I would send them a cold note and thank them for connecting and tell them a little about me.*
>
> *- Program participant*

Armed with newfound confidence and technical know-how, many participants felt empowered to take the initiative in broadening their networks and building relationships with others. This was a practice that many participants acknowledged that they did not engage in prior to being a part of their respective programs: "Before [the program], I've never taken initiative to go to recruiters or message anyone, so that's something I've definitely done." Participants described how they would take the initiative in building connections by looking for commonalities with others and taking a genuine interest in other people. They also began to see how beneficial relationships and connections were to their future life goals. For example, one participant shared that it was important to take a genuine interest in someone "cause you never know, that person could be your boss someday."

Participants also took the initiative to use their new networking skills with their peers, as they saw their peers as valuable assets for helping them broaden their networks and secure future opportunities. Participants connected with their peers by creating study groups, checking in with each other via Zoom, chatting on a Slack channel, or initiating social gatherings outside of the program. They learned to purposefully reach out to volunteers, industry experts, and alumni that they were introduced to through their programs.

Social Networks Strengthened in Size and Diversity

Program participants and staff members alike acknowledged that a key barrier for many young people in entering postsecondary institutions, the workforce, and other life opportunities is the experience of doing so alone. Many participants did not have a professional network to reach out to when searching for jobs, building skills, or going through the process of interviewing and starting new education and career pathways. One staff member noted that many young people in their program did not have this network because some may have been the first in their family to attend college, or their friends and family did not have an established network of professionals who could help connect them to information or opportunities.

> *"For the vast majority of them, their networks have definitely grown…*
>
> *- Program staff*

Through networking events, LinkedIn connections, and informal introductions, participants grew their networks professionally: "It opened up a horizon of people." Several participants were surprised and excited at how quickly their social networks grew, both in-person before the pandemic and online. One participant shared that "it grows practically every day, I would say." Others described how their networks grew "significantly" due to their experiences in the program: "…you don't just have a hundred people in your network, you have one hundred people's networks." Participants referred to how their networks now included individuals in careers that participants were interested in. This included those who were open to providing advice or feedback as they navigated their entrance to professional life: "He said, if you want to apply, let me know, I can help you." Some participants had conversations with individuals about professional life, and what they should expect: "I know more professionals in departments or companies that I'd be interested in, which I didn't before." In some cases, participants were able to secure a better paying job or an opportunity that they wouldn't have had access to without their new network. As one participant described, "Now, I'm able to communicate with other people and be able to have opportunities that I've never gotten before."

Participants grew their networks in size, but also in diversity. Some programs would encourage participants to travel outside their neighborhoods and meet people: "They give you a slip and they say, 'Go find five people that live in each borough of New York City." Another participant noted: "It's great to learn more about other people's lives outside of where I live." Participants shared that this helped them connect with a diverse array of people, and "not be scared of how to approach someone else who is different." For some participants, connecting with people of several races, ethnicities, and backgrounds allowed them to understand many different ways people experienced and "tackled problems." They noted that there may not have been an opportunity to make these diverse connections otherwise.

Built Authentic Relationships

Learning networking skills and building social networks also led to genuine relationships forming. Participants described creating a sense of community with the peers in their cohort: "I try to bring everybody in my group together and try to be together with them as much as I can, just to build that sense of community and family." This sense of community often led to participants feeling more comfortable asking their peers for help and advice as they navigated their education and employment pathways.

Participants overwhelmingly shared that the peer-cohort model was beneficial for their success in the program and for forming community with one another. Many participants described their cohort as their "community," a "backbone," and having "strong bonds." A sense of camaraderie, or "we're all here for each other no matter what," resonated across programs. It is important to note that young people enrolled in these programs were not the only participants who felt a sense of community with each other. Former peer cohorts continued to stay in contact after leaving the program. Several near peers, such as coaches and fellows, felt that camaraderie extend from their own cohort to new cohorts as they entered the programs. Staff members were excited to see that these community bonds were fostered even through the pandemic, with peer cohorts taking the initiative to reach out to each other on virtual platforms.

Some groups discussed what it would be like if the programs did not include the component of a peer cohort: "Had that piece not been there, it would've just kinda been like buying a course online, 'Oh, learn digital marketing by yourself!' and it's like, yeah, anyone could do that." Another noted, "it would have been definitely very, very lonely if we didn't have the [peer cohort.]"

Summary and Discussion

The barriers to employment experienced by many youth and young adults who are marginalized are uniquely challenging, heightened in many ways by the ongoing global pandemic. Inequitable access to resources or adequate career and education support can shut many talented young people out of the process entirely. Worse yet, if they do begin a job in their chosen career, many will continue to experience discrimination in the workplace. It is important to note that these barriers are largely due to systemic and institutional inequities, not due to deficits of the individuals who encounter these barriers. The staff that lead the programs in this report were acutely aware of the barriers participants face (and have often faced them themselves). In fact, it is the awareness and experience of these barriers that has often been the impetus to create programs that address inequities and navigate barriers. While the partner programs cannot expect to completely mitigate the layers of inequities that exist, the qualitative findings in this report revealed how programs have addressed many of these barriers in powerful ways.

Responsiveness During COVID

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of how programs are run and how participants view their futures. "It's a little bit hard right now, obviously, because people aren't really hiring." Participants shared how their energy has changed as a result: "This pandemic is really making me not motivated;" "I don't know if it's worth it at this point."

One of the most drastic changes to programs was similar to the response of many organizations across the country: moving everything typically done in-person to an online, virtual format. Some participants struggled with this change: "We end up retreating to our bubbles." However, for many, the programs provided much needed structure and support. As one participant noted, "…[you're] still learning new things, getting certifications, applying for jobs. It feels like you're moving, even though we can't physically get out." Others said they'd be "a mess" without the support of their program during this stressful time.

Staff shared that they were thinking all the time about how to be responsive to their participants during the pandemic. They were concerned that their in-person curriculum designed to build relationships might not translate online. They talked about doing more frequent "check ins" to see how participants were doing. One program began a series of "town hall" meetings over zoom so that young people across the country could connect and support one another: "…a lot of people are scared and anxious during this time. So, just to have that safe space, even if you already went through the program or you're still going through the program, is definitely a big thing."

Participants shared how their programs created a sense of emotional safety, provided spaces to explore and expand personal identities, gave opportunities for skill development, and intentionally built relationships and expanded social networks. Participants described how the one-on-one relationships they had with peers, near peers, and staff members were characteristic of the five elements of developmental relationships (express care, challenge growth, share power, provide support, and expand possibilities). These program characteristics along with the high-quality relationships participants experienced, were central to participants' personal growth across multiple areas including greater self-confidence, a clearer vision and plan for the future, the development of networking skills, and ultimately, strengthened social capital.

Social Capital Measurement

Although program partners are implementing program components that are believed to help support new relationships and strengthen existing connections, many are seeking well-validated measures of relationships and social capital. Good measurement is essential for helping the partner organizations understand how their program broadens and promotes participant's social capital development. Partner organizations can use this information to make programmatic changes to strengthen the relationships being formed within and outside their programs, while also ensuring that all young people are being equitably supported. The section below outlines how these partner organizations are already actively thinking and capturing elements of participants' social capital as well as recommendations for new measures and practices to further illuminate the value of social capital in the lives of youth and young adults.

Recommendations for Strengthening Social Capital Measurement

Partners are committed to learning more about how they support participants' social capital development. Many have integrated data collection efforts to inform their program practices. For example, most of the partners administer surveys at the beginning and end of their programs. Several are even collecting information on a number of relationship and social capital indicators including networking skills, perceptions of belonging and inclusion, number of peer or co-worker relationships, and relationship quality. For a review of how partner programs and other similar youth- and young adult-serving programs are thinking about and trying to capture social capital through measurement, please refer to a recent report by the Christensen Institute (Charania & Freeland-Fisher, 2020).

The partner organizations serve as exemplars to many similar youth- and young adult-serving organizations who have yet to utilize the power of measurement. Without adequate measurement, it is difficult to know who is benefiting from a program, who is in need of additional support, and where program practices can be improved, streamlined, and made more cost-effective to better support participants. In short, good social capital measurement is essential for illustrating how social networks are supporting young people as they work towards their life goals. It is difficult to know what elements of relationships and social capital to measure without first understanding participants' lived experiences of social capital. Thus, the focus groups were a first attempt to understand how participants are experiencing social capital. Several important findings emerged that can inform more effective measurement:

1 Measure the multidimensional nature of social capital.

All partners would benefit from adding measures of social capital that include multiple dimensions of relationships and the types of resources participants receive by and through these relationships.

One of the most important dimensions of social capital to emerge from focus groups was the quality of relationships. The quality of relationships matters, and yet, few of the partners are measuring this social capital feature. The findings showed that participants are not only experiencing strong relationships, but also relationships that are characterized by the five elements of developmental relationships that have been identified through Search Institute's research

(Express Care, Challenge Growth, Provide Support, Share Power, and Expand Possibilities). The Developmental Relationships Framework goes beyond other definitions of "quality" relationships, which often focus solely on expressing care. Rather, it is the combination of all five elements that are essential to strengthening youth and young adults' social capital. These five elements provide young people with more relational opportunities and resources as they navigate education and career pathways, each of which can be captured through measurement.

There were also many types of resources that participants gained through their programs including access to information, introductions to new connections, technical training, and socio-emotional development. It can be something as small as an introduction to a hiring manager that lands someone a job. It will therefore be important for program partners to track the type of resources that participants are receiving and how they contribute to youth and young adults' life success. Youth and young adults may also need different types of resources at different points in time and some may be more valuable than others. Without measuring the types of resources participants are gaining through their programs, it is difficult to know if participants are getting the "right" resources to achieve their goals.

2 Capture perceptions of network strength.

When asked in what ways participants have changed during their programs, many participants noted that their social networks were strengthened. Participants felt that their social network strengthened in terms of size, quality, diversity (i.e., more relationships with people from different backgrounds and/or experiences), and access to more resources. These perceptions matter. If participants feel that they have the relationships and resources they need to succeed, they will be more likely to mobilize their social network as they work towards their life goals.

Capturing participants' perceptions of the strength of their networks can also help programs understand who may need more support and what type of support is needed. The qualitative findings provide support for this reasoning. Although most participants described how their social network was strengthened, some participants noted that they still wanted more relationships and relationships with people within their industry or field of interest. This suggests that some participants felt they still had relationship gaps to be filled.

It will also be important for programs to assess program participants' perceptions of the strength of their networks at baseline. Participants come to programs with many skills and strengths. Likewise, participants come to programs with already developed social networks composed of friends, family members, and other adults and mentors. Programs should assess participants' perceptions of these existing networks. Capturing these baseline perceptions will help programs know where they need to dial-in to ensure that participants' social networks are being strengthened over the course of the program.

3 Map relationships

Relationship mapping is a useful tool to visualize who is in a young person's network. Mapping relationships at the beginning of a program can help program staff and participants see which relationships and resources are already at their disposal and how these relationships can be activated to further education and work-related goals. Relationship mapping often involves participants and program staff generating a list of connections and relationships. Unfortunately, this approach is often an impractical way to efficiently map participant's relationships in real-time. Although mapping relationships poses multiple challenges, the importance of mapping should not be diminished and future practitioner-friendly tools should be explored for turning this recommendation into a reality.

4 Track other outcome and skills aligned with accessing and mobilizing social networks.

Programs have many goals for their participants that go beyond social capital. However, program outcomes do not occur in isolation. Rather, skills and practices that are useful for building social capital are often useful for enhancing positive outcomes in other areas. For example, many participants described how they learned to take the initiative in building their social networks as a result of greater self-confidence, time to explore themselves and their identities, and opportunities for skill building within an emotionally safe environment. Without these additional opportunities for exploration and skill development, it is unlikely participants would be able to use their social networks to reach their full potential. Partners should assess additional competencies and skills (e.g., confidence, self-awareness, relationship skills, and purpose) so they can identify where their program may need to be adapted to strengthen participants' social capital and ability to mobilize social networks.

5 Assess social capital over time.

The level of social capital will likely change throughout a program as participants are introduced to more individuals and continue to broaden their networks. Social capital should be assessed at multiple time points to see how social capital changes and whether there are participants in need of further support. For example, many alumni shared how they were still relying on their peers and program staff for support even post-program. Many of the partner organizations are not currently tracking whether the peer-to-peer network that is formed within the program is sustained and accessed later. Due to the strong alumni network and near-peer model that many of these organizations have, this may be a valuable contribution to partners' current measurement strategies. This type of measurement has the potential to show the long lasting impact that these programs have on the social capital of youth and young adults.

Next Steps for Social Capital Tool Development

Based on these recommendations, Search Institute is in the process of developing useful measures of social capital that resonate with participants' experiences and can be used to strengthen program delivery. Search Institute will create survey-based measures of social capital that capture its multiple dimensions; the quality of the relationships formed and the unique resources they provide; participants' perceptions of the strength of their social networks; and participants' ability to build, access, and mobilize these relationships. These measures will be developed to capture change in these dimensions over the course of a program and beyond.

The survey items will subsequently be reviewed by experts and program participants for additional feedback. Once data is collected, survey measures will then undergo psychometric testing and further revision to maintain reliability and validity. We hope and believe that these resulting measures will be a valuable addition to the tools the partner programs are currently using to strengthen youth and young adults' social capital and increase their educational and occupational success.

In addition to survey-based measures of social capital, different resources such as social network analysis and other relationship mapping tools exist for measuring the size and strength of social capital. These techniques often require the expertise of a researcher or data scientist, which may not be available to current partners. Search Institute's goal is to create measures and tools that can be sustained over time with the limited resources many youth- and young adult-serving organizations have. Search Institute is therefore reviewing available options and will work with the partner organizations to select the ones that best meet their needs.

Conclusion

All youth and young adults benefit from positive relationships that enhance the social capital needed to achieve their goals. Yet, now more than ever, social capital is not equitably distributed. Large portions of America's youth and young adults, notably many young people of color and young people from low-income communities, lack the relationships, connections, and resources required to prepare them for education and work opportunities. This is further exacerbated within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are living in an unprecedented time, where many young people are disconnected from their peers, family members, schools, and work colleagues. That is why now is the time to invest in young people's relationships. Young people need access to developmental relationships and equitable social capital more than ever before. Programs that foster social capital, such as the ones highlighted in this report, are one promising avenue for helping young people reach their full potential and life goals. This is further supported by the voice of program participants who echoed how much they valued and appreciated being a part of BASTA, Beyond 12, Braven, Climb Hire, COOP, and nXu. One participant put it simply: "It was a support network system that made me believe in myself." It is imperative to provide these programs and the broader field with good tools for measuring social capital so they can continue to track, assess, and monitor the important impact they are having on the lives of their program participants.

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Appendix A

Developmental Relationships Framework

Young people are more likely to grow up successfully when they experience developmental relationships with important people in their lives. Developmental relationships are close connections through which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them. Search Institute has identified five elements — expressed in 20 specific actions — that make relationships powerful in young people's lives.

Elements	Actions	Definitions
Express Care Show me that I matter to you.	• Be dependable • Listen • Believe in me • Be warm • Encourage	Be someone I can trust. Really pay attention when we are together. Make me feel known and valued. Show me you enjoy being with me. Praise me for my efforts and achievements.
Challenge Growth Push me to keep getting better.	• Expect my best • Stretch • Hold me accountable • Reflect on failures	Expect me to live up to my potential. Push me to go further. Insist I take responsibility for my actions. Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks.
Provide Support Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.	• Navigate systems. • Empower • Advocate • Set boundaries	Guide me through hard situations and Build my confidence to take charge of my life. Stand up for me when I need it. Put in place limits that keep me on track.
Share Power Treat me with respect and give me a say.	• Respect me • Include me • Collaborate • Let me lead	Take me seriously and treat me fairly. Involve me in decisions that affect me. Work with me to solve problems. Create opportunities for me to take action.
Expand Possibilities Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.	• Inspire • Broaden horizons • Connect	Inspire me to see possibilities for my future. Expose me to new ideas, experiences, places. Introduce me to people who can help me grow.

Note. Relationships are, by definition, bidirectional, with each person giving and receiving. So each person in a strong relationship both engages in and experiences each of these actions. However, for the purpose of clarity, this framework is expressed from the perspective of one young person.

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