



Insights & Evidence

**The Power of Social Capital: Findings
from the Social Capital Assessment and
Learning for Equity (SCALE) Project**



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Key Findings

1

Strong Practitioner-Centered Measures: The Social Capital for Assessment and Learning for Equity (SCALE) project was a measure development project. A main goal of this report, therefore, is to illustrate key findings using the newly developed social capital measures. These measures were found to be both reliable and valid in data collection efforts. For more information on the psychometric properties of these measures, please refer to the SCALE Technical Manual.

2

Near Peers as an Important Social Capital Resource: Most partners who participated in the SCALE project targeted three relational targets: program peers, program near peers (often serving in mentorship or coaching roles), and educators. Of all of these relationships, near peers emerged as the strongest developmental relationship and the relationship that provided program participants with the most resources such as valuable information, connections to others, and useful skills needed to reach education or employment goals.

3

Program Support for Social Capital Development: Program participants overwhelmingly reported that as a result of their participation in their respective programs, they strengthened skills, have access to more useful information, have a larger network of relationships, and are more connected to influential people who are useful for pursuing their goals.

4

The Power of Social Capital: When comparing social capital to program outcomes, findings showed that participants who had higher levels of social capital as well as a stronger and more diverse network, also reported greater progress toward their education or employment goals, more of a commitment to paying-it-forward to others, and to believe in their collective efficacy to change education and employment systems to be more accessible and equitable.

Introduction

With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Social Capital Assessment and Learning for Equity (SCALE) Project launched in January 2020 with the purpose of developing measures of social capital that practitioners could use to better understand how social capital and strong peer-to-peer relationships help youth and young adults secure education and/or employment opportunities.

Search Institute defines social capital as the resources that arise from a web of relationships, which 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 educationally- and occupationally-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 important constructs.

Search Institute believes that effective measurement can inform program improvements and further support youth's and young adults' life success. Thus, we partnered with six youth and young adult-serving organizations (i.e., Basta, Beyond 12, Braven, Climb Hire, COOP, and nXu) to develop practitioner-friendly measures that capture young people's social capital and other important domains. All six of the organizations that Search Institute partnered with to develop those measures are exemplars in the emerging field of social capital development. The deep experience that each organization brought to the SCALE project powerfully informed the development and testing of the new measures. That deep experience may also be one reason that all six of the organizations scored relatively high on the measures of social capital and related constructs that are summarized in this report. In the future, these measures will be made available to a broader set of organizations that serve youth and young adults, such as high schools and postsecondary institutions, many of which will not have made significant investments in strengthening the social capital of the young people and young adults that they serve. It will be important to analyze the data that emerges through partnerships with that broader set of organizations to develop solutions for strengthening social capital in all of the environments where youth and young adults learn and grow.

As an applied research organization, we are committed to sharing insights as they emerge from our research. Thus, the purpose of this brief is to showcase key findings that transpired from the use of these newly created social capital measures. This brief is organized in a way that provides a brief overview of the newly created measures and a descriptive snapshot of youth's and young adults' experiences of social capital, program support for social capital, and their progress towards education and career goals.

For more detailed information about these measures, please see the Social Capital Assessment and Learning for Equity (SCALE) Measures: User Guide.



Methods

Data come from youth and young adults who took a Search Institute developed survey on social capital between January 2021 - March 2021. These data were collected through a 10-15-minute online survey that was administered by each of the six partner organizations (i.e., Basta, Beyond 12, Braven, Climb Hire, COOP, and nXu). It was made clear that participation was completely voluntary and that choosing to not participate would in no way impact participants' relationships with their program. All participants had an opportunity to enter into a \$50 e-gift card raffle as a thank you for their participation. For more information on the measure development process and the psychometric properties of these measures, please see Search Institute's Social Capital Assessment and Learning for Equity (SCALE) Technical Manual.



Participants

Data come from a diverse sample of 994 youth and young adults ranging from 13 - 52 years of age ($M = 20.8$). At the time of data collection, all participants were participating in programming at one of the six partner organizations. Over half of the sample identified as female (70%). Less than 1% (0.6%) of participants identified as transgender. Participants self-identified as Asian or Pacific Islander (19.2%), Black or African American (28.1%), Hispanic or Latinx (33.4%), Native American or Alaskan Native (0.3%), White (5.8%), multiracial (11.9%), or as another race (1.2%).

Program Partners

To develop measures of social capital, Search Institute partnered with six nationally leading pioneers in social capital development of youth and young adults. Each of these organizations and their mission statements are provided below.

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 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 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 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 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 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.

Social Capital

Social capital was assessed with an 8-item scale. Five items assess developmental relationships with peers, near peers (who often served in mentorship roles), and educators. Three items assess resources (i.e., access to information, skill-building opportunities, and connections to others) provided from and through relationships.

Participants responded to each of the items using a 5-point agreement scale. An overall social capital score was calculated by averaging all items. Scores were transformed onto a 100-point scale and categorized into three levels:

1. **Low** (scored in 25th percentile or below)
2. **Medium** (scored between the 25th and 75th percentile)
3. **High** (scored in the 75th percentile or higher)

Social capital matters. Previous research shows that social capital is associated with a host of positive outcomes including greater educational attainment, full-time employment, and career advancement opportunities (Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Kim & Schneider, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Social capital can be defined as the resources that arise from a web of relationships, which people can access and mobilize to help them improve their lives and achieve their goals (Scales et al., 2020).

Developmental Relationships

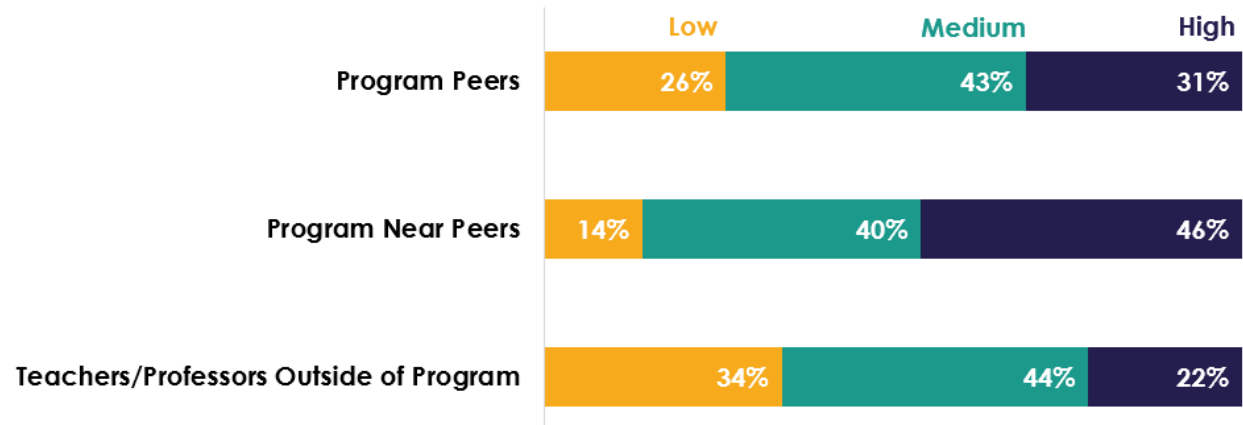
A key ingredient to building strong social capital is increasing youth's and young adults' access to developmental relationships. A developmental relationship is a close connection through which young people discover who they are, gain abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to interact with and contribute to the world around them. A developmental relationship is operationalized by the combination of five interconnected elements: express care, challenge growth, provide support, share power, and expand possibilities.

Resources

Social capital includes more than just developmental relationships. Social capital also includes the resources that individuals receive through these high-quality relationships. Resources can include things such as financial or material help, information, skill-building opportunities, and guidance. The social capital measure focuses on three types of resources: access to useful information, new connections, and skill-building opportunities.



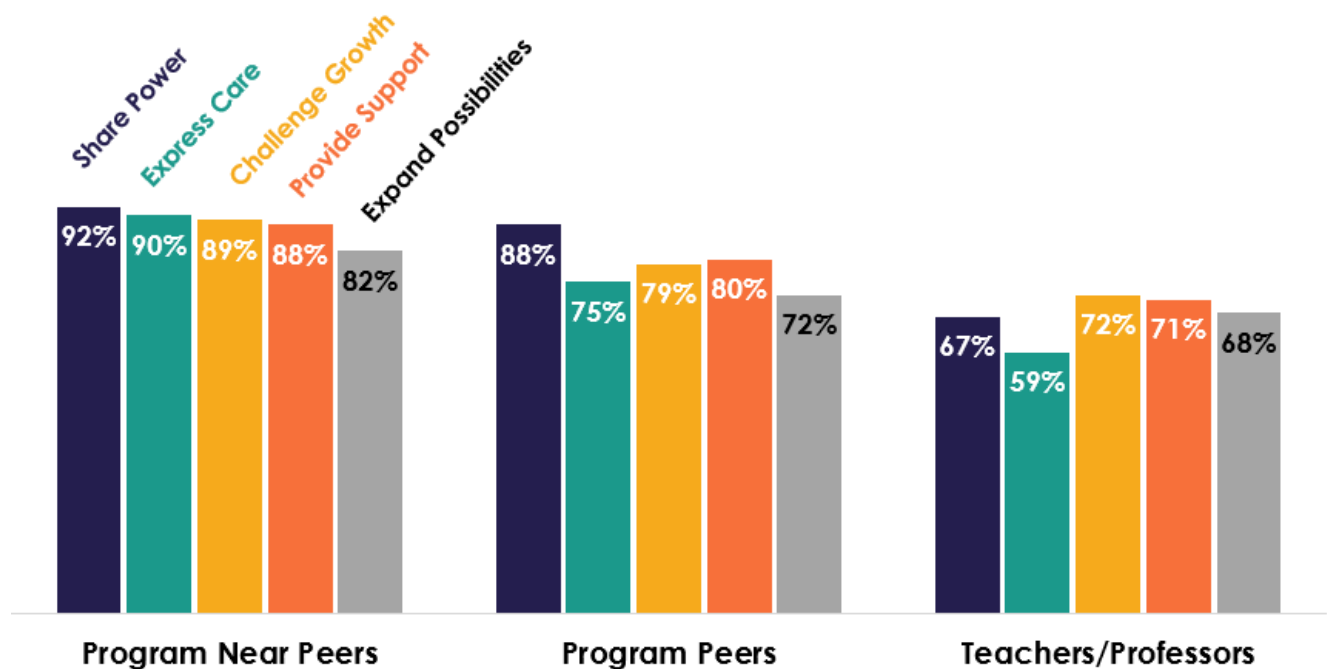
Participants tend to experience the most social capital from relationships with near peers



Using the low, medium, and high social capital categories, findings showed that a higher percentage of program participants report strong developmental relationships and access to important resources via their relationships with program near peers. Program near peers often included young people who were relatively close in age to program participants and served as a mentor or coach to program participants as they worked towards their education and/or career goals.

No statistically significant differences were found in the level of social capital that program participants experienced with each of the three relationships by participant gender or race and ethnicity. It was found that older participants tended to report higher levels of social capital from all three relationships relative to younger participants.

Program participants report having the strongest developmental relationships with near peers



The following chart shows the percentage of youth and young adults that agree or strongly agree with experiencing each of the five elements of a developmental relationship with their program near peers, program peers, and teachers/professors. Findings show that a higher percentage of program participants report experiencing each of the five elements with their program near peers relative to their program peers or their teachers/professors outside of their program.

Program participants report experiencing share power from their program near peers (i.e., actions that treat young people with respect and give them a say) the most and experiencing express care from their teachers/professors (i.e., actions that show young people they matter) the least.

Near peers provide participants with access to valuable resources for reaching education and career goals

The following chart shows the percentage of program participants who agree or strongly agree that they received the following resources from their program near peers, program peers, and teachers/professors: access to new connections, access to useful information, and opportunities to build new skills and strengthen existing skills.

Findings show that a higher percentage of program participants report receiving these three resources from their program near peers relative to their teachers/professor outside of their programs or their program peers.

Make connections.

73%

63%

61%

Build new skills and strengthen existing skills.

88%

77%

75%

Provided useful information.

88%

74%

72%

Near Peers

Teachers/Professors

Peers

Network Strength + Diversity

Two measures were created to assess participants network strength and diversity.

Network diversity was assessed with a 4-item scale and network strength was assessed with a 5-item scale.

Participants responded to each of the items using a 5-point agreement scale. An overall network strength and diversity score was calculated by averaging all items. Subsequent analysis also used scores that were transformed onto a 100-point scale and categorized into three levels:

1. **Low** (scored in 25th percentile or below)
2. **Medium** (scored between the 25th and 75th percentile)
3. **High** (scored in the 75th percentile or higher)

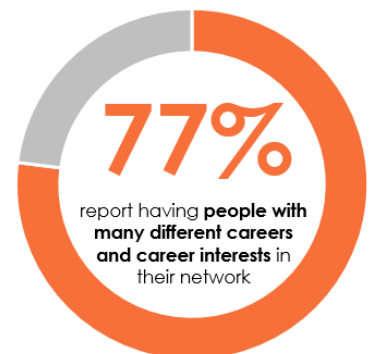
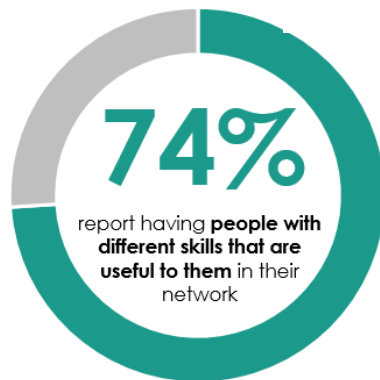
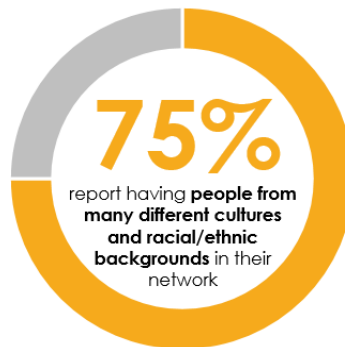
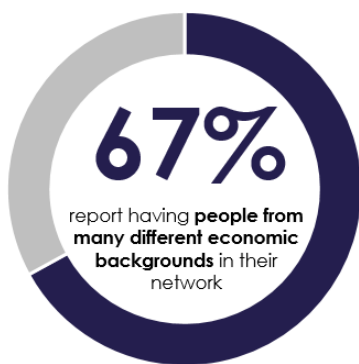
While it is important that youth and young adults have a web of developmentally-rich relationships that can provide access to resources for reaching career or education goals, it is also important that young people have a strong and diverse social network. Many program participants shared that their programs helped to grow, strengthen, and diversify their social networks.

“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.”

- Program participant



Roughly two-thirds or more of program participants report having a diverse network

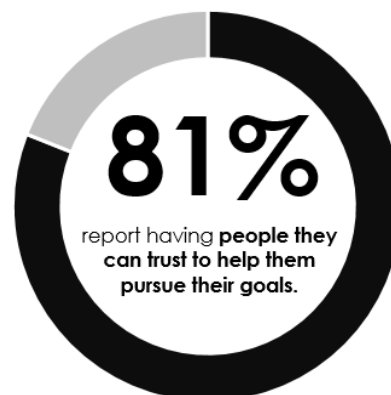


Findings show that most program participants report having a diverse network of people. Participants tend to report having people in their network “from many different economic backgrounds” the least (67%) and “people with many different careers or career interests” the most (77%).

No statistically significant differences were found in the level of network diversity that program participants experienced by participant gender or race and ethnicity. It was found that older participants tended to report higher levels of network diversity relative to younger participants.



Over two-thirds of participants report having strong networks



Findings show that most program participants report having a strong network. Participants tend to report having people in their network “who they are less close to but that are influential in helping them reach their education or career goals” the least (66%) and “people who they can trust to help them pursue their goals” the most (81%).

No statistically significant differences were found in the level of network diversity that program participants experienced by participant gender, age, or race and ethnicity.



Program Support for Social Capital Development

All of the program partners are committed to supporting the social capital development of the youth and young adults they serve. Thus, a 4-item scale of program support for social capital development was created to help programs better understand what sort of impact they are having on young people's social capital.

Another key component of strengthening an individual's social capital is to ensure that they have the mindsets and skills to successfully activate and mobilize their relationships and resources in pursuit of their goals. A 3-item scale of self-initiated social capital (i.e., the degree to which an individual goes out of their way to build relationships and use the relationships and the resources they have to reach their goals) was developed.

Participants responded to each of the items using a 5-point agreement scale. An overall score for each measures was calculated by averaging all items.

Over three-quarters of participants report receiving social capital support through their programs

As a result of my participation in [program name]...

I have access to more useful information for pursuing my education or career goals.



I have more people I can go to to help me pursue my education or career goals.



I have developed or strengthened skills needed to pursue my education or career goals.



I am connected with more influential people who are useful for pursuing my education or career goals.



Disagree or
Strongly Disagree

Somewhat Agree
and Disagree

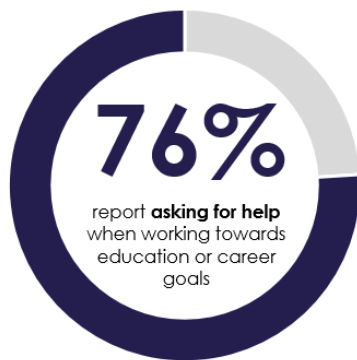
Agree or
Strongly Agree

This chart shows findings from the program support for social capital development scale. Program participants overwhelmingly report that they agree or strongly agree that as a result of their participation in their respective programs, they have access to more useful information (84%), have more people they can go to for help (80%), have developed or strengthened skills (78%), and are connected with more influential people (74%).

It was also found that participants who report greater program support for social capital development also report significantly higher levels of social capital, and a stronger and more diverse network (see Endnote 1).



Most participants ask for help when needed, fewer go out of their way to meet new people



This chart shows findings from the self-initiated social capital scale. While a high percentage of program participants report that they agree or strongly agree that they ask for help (76%) and form strong relationships with people who are useful for reaching goals (65%), fewer report going out of their way to meet new people in order to reach their education or career goals (50%).

This may be an opportunity for growth among program participants, as it was also found that program participants who report greater self-initiated social capital also report significantly higher levels of social capital, and a stronger and more diverse network (see Endnote 2).



Progress Towards Education and Career Outcomes

Three measures were created to assess participants progress towards education or career goals, their commitment to paying-it-forward to others, and their collective efficacy to change systems.

Progress towards education or career goals and commitment to paying-it-forward were both assessed with a 4-item scale. Collective efficacy to change systems was assessed with a 3-item scale.

Participants responded to each of the items using a 5-point agreement scale. An overall score for each of the scales was calculated by averaging all items.

“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].”

- Program participant

Over two-thirds of participants report making progress towards their education or career goals

I am making progress towards my education or career goals.



I have already sought out people who can help me pursue my education or career goals.



I have made a plan to reach my education or career goals.



I have already taken important steps towards pursuing my education or career goals.



Disagree or
Strongly Disagree

Somewhat Agree
and Disagree

Agree or
Strongly Agree

This chart shows findings from the progress towards education or career goals scale. Program participants report that they agree or strongly agree that they are making progress towards their education or career goals the most (82%) and report that they have already taken important steps towards pursuing their education or career goals the least (65%).



Over two-thirds of participants report that they are committed to paying-it-forward to others



This chart shows findings from the commitment to paying-it-forward scale. Program participants report that they agree or strongly agree that they pass on their skills and knowledge to others (86%) and report that they help others by introducing them to new people or connections the least (68%).



Most participants report high levels of collective efficacy to change education and career systems

84% of

participants agree that by working with their program, **we can improve education or employment systems by using the resources gained from their program (e.g., information, skills, connections)**

85% of

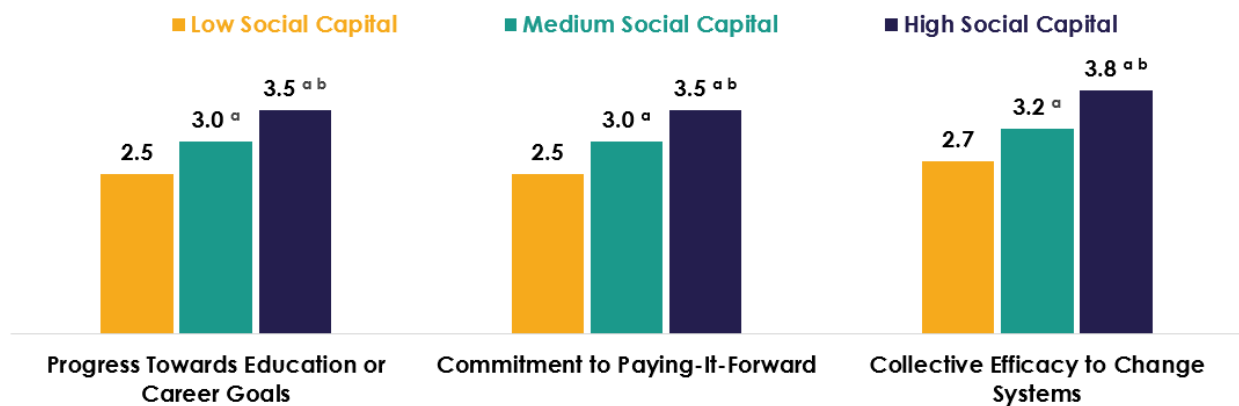
participants agree that by working with their program, **we can create new education and career opportunities for people who might not have otherwise had them.**

87% of

participants agree that by working with their program, **we can increase access to education or career opportunities for other people like me.**

The Power of Social Capital

Participants with higher levels of social capital tend to report higher levels across all program outcomes

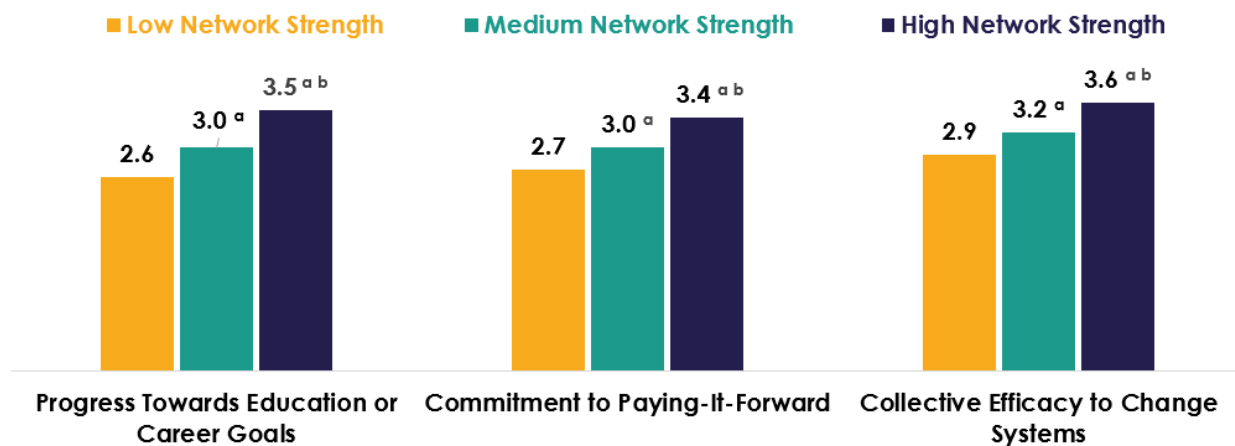


^a Denotes significant difference from low social capital

^b Denotes significant difference from medium social capital

Findings show that program participants with higher levels of social capital tend to report significantly higher mean scores on the progress towards education or career goals, commitment to paying-it-forward, and collective efficacy to change systems scales relative to participants who were categorized as having low or medium levels of social capital (see Endnote 3)

Participants with higher levels of network strength report higher levels across all program outcomes

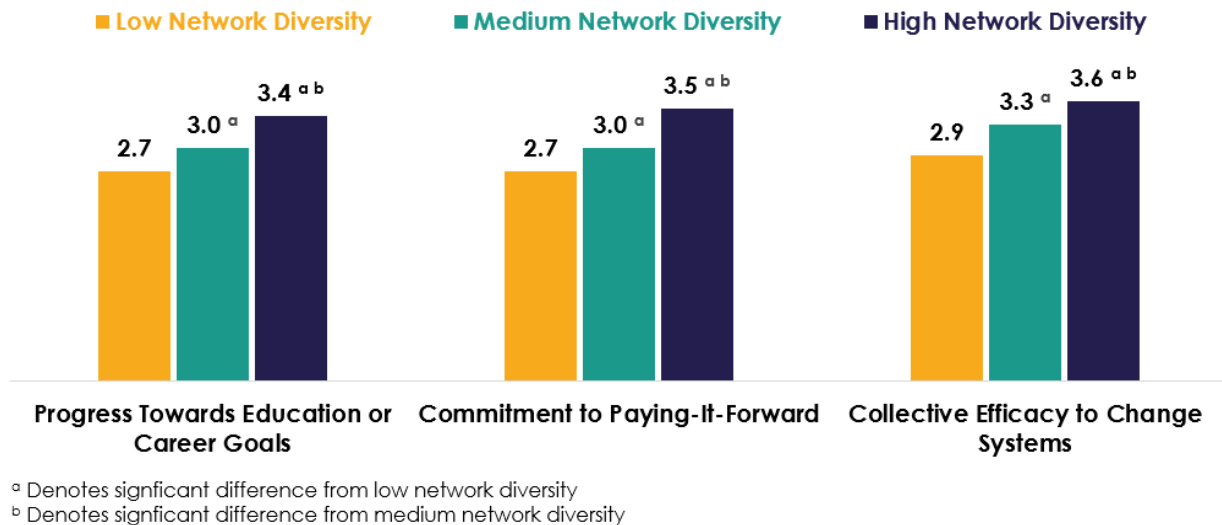


^a Denotes significant difference from low network strength

^b Denotes significant difference from medium network strength

Findings show that program participants with higher levels of network strength tend to report significantly higher mean scores on the progress towards education or career goals, commitment to paying-it-forward, and collective efficacy to change systems scales relative to participants who were categorized as having low or medium levels of network strength (see Endnote 4).

Participants with higher levels of **network diversity** report higher levels across all program outcomes



Findings show that program participants with higher levels of network diversity tend to report significantly higher mean scores on the progress towards education or career goals, commitment to paying-it-forward, and collective efficacy to change systems scales relative to participants who were categorized as having low or medium levels of network diversity (see Endnote 5).



Conclusion

Emerging findings for the Social Capital Assessment and Learning for Equity (SCALE) project reinforce that social capital and strong peer-to-peer relationships are critical levers that are related to youth and young adults' progress towards their education and career goals. While these findings are promising, they are also correlational and so we cannot conclude with certainty that investing in social capital will lead to stronger education and workforce development outcomes for young people.

We hope that the findings presented, however, inspire program, organizational, and school leaders to see how they have the potential to promote social capital by connecting youth and young adults to both relationships and resources. Furthermore, organizations can help center social capital development within their work by measuring how young people experience relationship-building efforts, by tracking the resources relationships facilitate access to, and by ensuring that all young people are being equitably supported.

Search Institute is committed to providing further evidence for the importance of social capital in the years ahead. Our research aims to develop a wide range of relationship-building tools that enhance peer-to-peer connections and strengthens social networks across multiple settings and contexts. We hope to begin to assess the degree to which these tools produce meaningful improvements in education and career trajectories so that all young people can thrive.



Endnotes

(1) One-way ANCOVAs showed a significant difference in how program participants experience program support for social capital development across different levels of social capital, $F(2, 651) = 164.96, p < .001$, network strength, $F(2, 653) = 81.43, p < .001$, and network diversity, $F(2, 652) = 75.91, p < .001$. This, and all subsequent ANCOVAs controlled for participant gender, age, race, and program. On average, program participants reported higher program support for social capital development among the high social capital group ($M = 3.74$) relative to the medium ($M = 3.09$) and low ($M = 2.38$) groups. Program participants reported higher program support for social capital development among the high network strength group ($M = 3.50$) relative to the medium ($M = 3.12$) and low ($M = 2.64$) groups. Program participants reported higher program support for social capital development among the high network diversity group ($M = 3.52$) relative to the medium ($M = 3.08$) and low ($M = 2.58$) groups.

(2) One-way ANCOVAs, including the covariates outline above, showed a significant difference in how program participants experience self-initiated social capital across different levels of social capital, $F(2, 648) = 74.27, p < .001$, network strength, $F(2, 650) = 72.95, p < .001$, and network diversity, $F(2, 649) = 56.61, p < .001$. On average, program participants reported higher self-initiated social capital among the high social capital group ($M = 3.30$) relative to the medium ($M = 2.75$) and low ($M = 2.32$) groups. Program participants reported higher self-initiated social capital among the high network strength group ($M = 3.23$) relative to the medium ($M = 2.74$) and low ($M = 2.32$) groups. Program participants reported higher self-initiated social capital among the high network diversity group ($M = 3.23$) relative to the medium ($M = 2.73$) and low ($M = 2.43$) groups.

(3) One-way ANCOVAs, including the covariates outline above, showed a significant difference in how program participants experience progress towards education or career goals, $F(2, 649) = 103.13, p < .001$, commitment to paying-it-forward, $F(2, 647) = 89.39, p < .001$, and collective efficacy to change systems, $F(2, 651) = 100.82, p < .001$, across social capital groups. On average, program participants reported higher progress towards education or career goals among the high social capital group ($M = 3.54$) relative to the medium ($M = 2.99$) and low ($M = 2.51$) groups. Program participants reported higher commitment to paying-it-forward among the high social capital group ($M = 3.52$) relative to the medium ($M = 3.03$) and low ($M = 2.57$) groups. Program participants reported higher collective efficacy to change systems among the high social capital group ($M = 3.73$) relative to the medium ($M = 3.26$) and low ($M = 2.77$) groups.


(4) One-way ANCOVAs, including the covariates outline above, showed a significant difference in how program participants experience progress towards education or career goals, $F(2, 651) = 89.82, p < .001$, commitment to paying-it-forward, $F(2, 649) = 59.69, p < .001$, and collective efficacy to change systems, $F(2, 653) = 61.45, p < .001$ across network strength groups. On average, program participants reported higher progress towards education or career goals among the high network strength group ($M = 3.48$) relative to the medium ($M = 2.97$) and low ($M = 2.55$) groups. Program participants reported higher commitment to paying-it-forward among the high network strength group ($M = 3.44$) relative to the medium ($M = 2.98$) and low ($M = 2.69$) groups. Program participants reported higher collective efficacy to change systems among the

high network strength group ($M = 3.62$) relative to the medium ($M = 3.25$) and low ($M = 2.86$) groups.

(5) One-way ANCOVAs, including the covariates outline above, showed a significant difference in how program participants experience progress towards education or career goals, $F(2, 650) = 55.70, p < .001$, commitment to paying-it-forward, $F(2, 648) = 71.35, p < .001$, and collective efficacy to change systems, $F(2, 652) = 67.51, p < .001$ across network diversity groups. On average, program participants reported higher progress towards education or career goals among the high network diversity group ($M = 3.41$) relative to the medium ($M = 2.99$) and low ($M = 2.67$) groups. Program participants reported higher commitment to paying-it-forward among the high network diversity group ($M = 3.47$) relative to the medium ($M = 3.01$) and low ($M = 2.67$) groups. Program participants reported higher collective efficacy to change systems among the high network diversity group ($M = 3.64$) relative to the medium ($M = 3.26$) and low ($M = 2.89$) groups.

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A photograph showing the backs of three young people standing outdoors in a wooded area. The person on the left has long dark hair and is wearing a patterned top. The person in the middle has blonde hair and is wearing a light blue denim jacket. The person on the right has dark hair and is wearing a pink shirt and a black backpack. They are all standing close together with their arms around each other's shoulders. An orange rectangular box is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing white text.

This report was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the six partner organizations that participated in this important project with us (i.e., Basta, Beyond 12, Braven, Climb Hire, COOP, and nXu).