

Building Bridges and Strengthening Bonds: An Exploratory Investigation Into Social Capital and Youth Programming

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What Is the Purpose of this Study/Review?

- To use a community-based participatory research framework to assess the level of awareness of social capital among youth-serving organizations (YSOs) in nonprofits across California.
- To explore if and how YSOs integrate social capital programming in nonprofits across California.
- To assess the value of a social-capital curriculum and social-capital measurement tools to YSOs.

What Is the Problem?

- While the creation of social capital is a critical element in ensuring healthy adolescent development and longer-term success, it is not known if YSOs have an intentional focus on social capital, and if and how they operationalize its development.
- To the extent that YSOs are not helping youth build social capital, this reflects at least two missed opportunities: the organization itself could be building and modeling powerful collaborations for and on behalf of the youth, and youth could be developing critical skills and resources during their time with the YSO.

What Are the Findings?

- Many YSOs were not familiar with the term “social capital”; however, when the term was explained, most felt it is critically important skills youth could develop.
- Most delivered some form of social capital programming, although few focused on linking social capital—the form of social capital that develops and maintains social connections with institutions and actors that hold substantially different levels of power.
- Most YSOs identified having a measurement tool for social capital as highly important and were interested in adopting a social-capital curriculum.

Who Should Care Most?

- Researchers and funders should be aware that social capital is a critical aspect of youth development and recognize the missed opportunity these findings highlight.
- All YSOs should understand the power and importance of diverse social connections for youth.

Recommendations for Action

- There is a clear need to develop measures of social capital specific to youth and to develop and test a social-capital curriculum that a broad array of YSOs could adopt.
- Funders should provide support for research to develop and test such tools and for training and professional development build YSOs' capacity in this arena.