

MyWays Real-World Learning Toolkit

5 Zones of the Wider Learning Ecosystem Tool

About the Real-World Learning Toolkit

Connection to the MyWays Student Success Framework. NGLC’s MyWays project team spent three years exploring the broader, deeper competencies required for a complex future. One of the most striking conclusions of this work was that it’s difficult, if not impossible, to help learners develop these competencies without going outside the classroom walls. Learners need the complex, authentic, and inter-connected environment of real-world learning as well as the relationships with adults and development of social capital that environment brings.

Learning and design principles. The MyWays tools are designed with the following principles in mind: **students at the center**; **equity in access and design** (addressing barriers for historically marginalized learners); **learning mindset**; **learner-driven, personalized pathways**; and **high expectations with commensurate supports**.

What’s included in the toolkit and where does this document fit? The Real-World Learning Toolkit enables educators, school designers/redesigners, and their community partners to make the case for offering their students the benefits of real-world learning; assess their current state and assets; set the cornerstones for real-world learning design; and make plans for further design and piloting in their schools or districts. The tools are designed to be flexible — they can be used in a variety of ways, either individually or in combination.

Additional support is available. For help introducing real-world learning or other changes focused on your learner and educator needs, please contact [Next Generation Learning Challenges](#) to learn about our services and events.

Introduction

What needs does this tool address and how can I use it?

Learning, as we know, can take place “anyplace, anytime.” But exploration of changing realities, adolescent development, and whole learning suggests that our students need more intentionally organized and supported real-world learning (RWL) experiences to help them prepare to navigate in a changing world. MyWays, with its focus on a broader, deeper set of competencies, calls this full spectrum of student-centered learning opportunities outside of the classroom the Wider Learning Ecosystem. The 5 Zones of the Wider Learning Ecosystem Tool (WLE 5 Zones for short) clusters such experiences into five zones, which extend from just outside the classroom walls but potentially still school-based (extracurriculars) through those based in higher education, the workplace, and the community, as well as learning experiences that might take place in other face-to-face or online settings.

The tool can support you with these activities:

- Reflect on your own personal experience of real-world learning
- Inventory your school’s, district’s, or network’s existing Wider Learning Ecosystem offerings and gaps
- Identify your school’s, district’s or network’s potential Wider Learning Ecosystem assets and opportunities

What’s Included

- This introduction
- A graphic to introduce the concept and elements to be used in the tool
- A personal experience exercise based on the graphic
- Instructions for completion of the tool, for one to three potential use cases
- A blank tool worksheet
- Facilitator instructions

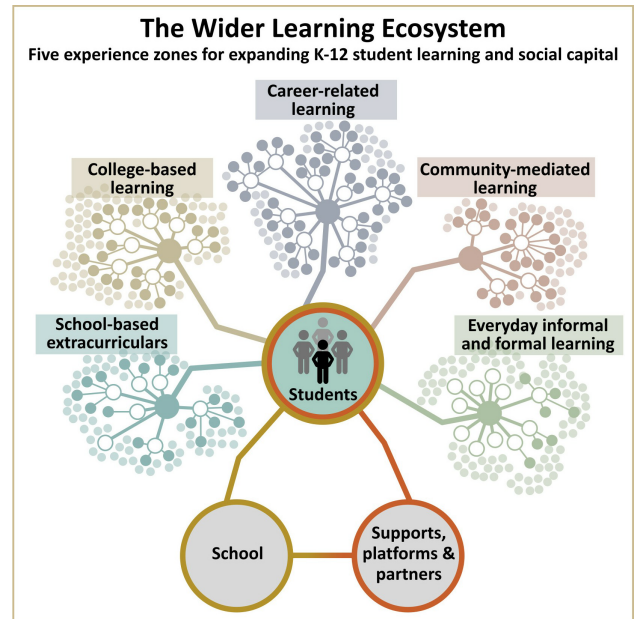
The 5 Zones of the Wider Learning Ecosystem

“Clearly, we face an urgent need to open up the learning landscape in America.... To do so, we need to create a richer fabric of learning opportunities for a diverse population of youth. The ‘we’ in this reform extends beyond traditional academic resources. A much broader segment of society needs to collaborate to find the domains and means to engage our young people in meaningful learning. Only then can we provide growth experiences that focus our young people’s passion and energy.”

—Robert Halpern, *It Takes a Whole Society*

The Wider Learning Ecosystem makes visible the broad expanse of opportunities beyond classroom learning that can enrich collective and individual learning as well as student agency — a landscape that is ever expanding, accessed through a range of settings, media, and relationships.

Most of the experiences relevant to K-12 learners that relate to learning, development, identity building, and social capital can be grouped into **five experience zones**. Navigating these zones requires both school inputs and a **support infrastructure** that enables young learners to access, engage with, and get the most out of the learning, growing, and networking they do outside the classroom walls.



School-based extracurriculars. As many of us know, activities that are commonly regarded as being on the “periphery of schools” can offer more authentic, vital learning than core classes. Theater productions, science fair work mentored by local scientists, or business start-up clubs may be school based, but many access or emulate the real world.

College-based learning. While focused on academic or vocational knowledge, programs such as dual enrollment or early college let high school learners broaden their horizons into vastly expanded subject areas, as well as offer students opportunities to develop greater independence and self-direction.

Career-related learning. There’s no better preparation for the “whitewater learning” that students will need to do in their adult work lives than to get exposure now, in supported ways, alongside adults. This type of learning includes early career awareness and exploration, internships, apprenticeships, and paid work.

Community-mediated learning. Youth development programs and collective learning network offerings available through community organizations ranging from museums to makerspaces, give learners excellent opportunities to develop identity, agency, and social capital.

Everyday informal & formal learning. This zone captures informal learning with friends and family, online learning, participation in online communities of practice, and myriad other paths.

MyWays WLE Personal Experience across the Zones

But first, let's start with your own personal experience of real-world learning. The goal here is to stretch your recognition of where, when, and how learning can happen. Populate the WLE 5 Zones inventory worksheet with experiences outside of the classroom during your middle school or high school years — experiences in which you learned valuable content or skills, developed habits that have served you well in later life, or started building networks or identifying mentors.

Note the experiences in the relevant zone box with the particular content, skill, habit, or network connection you gained in parentheses after each one.

You may find that you have a number of entries in one or two zones, but none at all in others.

Take time to share, compare, and reflect on the number and distribution of experiences. Consider possible reasons for variation, such as personal preferences; socioeconomic, racial or other barriers to opportunity; or even the decade when you attended secondary school.

MyWays WLE 5 Zones Tool – Inventory Worksheet

<p>College-based Learning including dual enrollment, early college high schools, individual access</p>	<p>Career-related Learning including career awareness & exploration, internships, apprenticeships, paid work</p>
<p>Community-mediated Learning individual community provider, afterschool & youth development programs, emerging collective networks</p>	<p>School-based Extracurriculars including co-curriculars, school extracurriculars, & career-oriented national extracurriculars</p>
<p>The Wider Learning Ecosystem Five experience zones for expanding K-12 student learning and social capital</p> 	<p>Everyday Informal & Formal Learning Online learning, communities of practice, informal learning w/ family & friends, homeschooling/unschooling</p>

Facilitator Instructions

Option 1: Use the tool to reflect on your personal experience of real-world learning in the WLE

- Assemble the team of educators, community partners, and learners who will be involved in assessing your current state and assets and/or designing a new real-world learning initiative. Assign pre-reading of “Learning Design Construct 1: Whole Learning, through junior versions” in [Learning Design for Broader, Deeper Competencies](#) (pages 23-39) of the *MyWays Student Success Series* if you determine that is appropriate for your workshop style and participants.
- Introduce the important concepts necessary for this analysis using the 5 Zones graphic contained in this tool.
- Lead participants through the Personal Experience exercise, following the approach you determine is appropriate to the group and goals. Some suggestions: Ask participants to fill in the zones based on their personal experiences in middle or high school as noted on the WLE 5 Zones inventory worksheet. Pair or group the participants so they can hear about others’ experiences, share or address questions, and reflect on patterns and possible equity issues involved. At the end you could ask for reflections on the potential for accessing particular zones that they had not previously considered for their school/district/network. You can also note to participants that this exercise has also introduced them to the tool they will be using to inventory the current and potential landscape for their school, district, or network.

Option 2: Use the tool to inventory existing real-world learning offerings and gaps across the WLE

- Assemble the team of educators, community partners, and learners who will be involved in assessing your current state and assets and/or designing a new real-world learning initiative. Assign pre-reading of “Learning Design Construct 1: Whole Learning, through junior versions” in [Learning Design for Broader, Deeper Competencies](#) of the *MyWays Student Success Series* if you determine that is appropriate for your workshop style and participants.
- **Work through Option 1 as described above, unless the group has already done this.** At this point the participants should be ready to use the WLE 5 Zones inventory worksheet to map the learning experiences in the Wider Learning Ecosystem currently on offer to your learners.
- Have the participants, working individually or in teams, complete the blank tool to inventory the following:
 - o **The existing experiences** that their learners have access to in each zone
 - o **Gaps in school or district offerings** in each zone
 - o **Barriers to participation and opportunity gaps** between students and/or groups of students

We suggest that participants record existing offerings and gaps in different colors of pens/markers (or fonts, if they complete the tool online).

- Have the teams share in pairs, groups, and/or to the whole group. At the end of this exercise the teams should have a draft picture of their current state to share with schools, learners, and other stakeholders for feedback or validation. They can then use this information about their current assets and opportunities to inform initial design and planning of new or enhanced RWL experiences in the 5 Zones.

Option 3: Use the tool to inventory potential real-world learning assets and opportunities across the WLE

- Option 3 is a follow-up to Option 2, in which participants inventoried existing programs and experiences and identified gaps. In this option, participants use that information to explore school and community assets and opportunities that can be used to strengthen the existing programs or fill the gaps. This option assumes that participants will have **already worked through Options 1 and 2** and are familiar with the WLE 5 Zones inventory worksheet from that previous work.
- Have the participants, working individually or in teams, complete the inventory worksheet provided to inventory the following:
 - o **The assets and potential assets** within the school, from organizations involved in each of the zones (higher education, business, community-based organizations, families, and organizations that offer online learning and mentoring support), and from the community at large (e.g., community organizations or individuals who are not associated with one of the zones but might be willing to fund WLE experiences).
 - o **Opportunities to use these assets** to improve or expand on an existing learning experience, create a new offering, or improve student supports, platforms, or partnerships with community organizations, companies, higher education institutions, or other local organizations.
 - o Ways to **use these assets to support more equitable access** to the WLE.
- Have the teams share in pairs, small groups, or to the whole group. At the end of this exercise, teams should be able to add a complementary inventory of assets and possible opportunities for real-world learning in the WLE to their inventory of their school's, district's, or network's current state. They can then integrate these new assets and opportunities as part of an on-the-ground RWL design or redesign process.



myways.nextgenlearning.org

© 2019 EDUCAUSE. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).