

MyWays Real-World Learning Toolkit

Social Capital 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

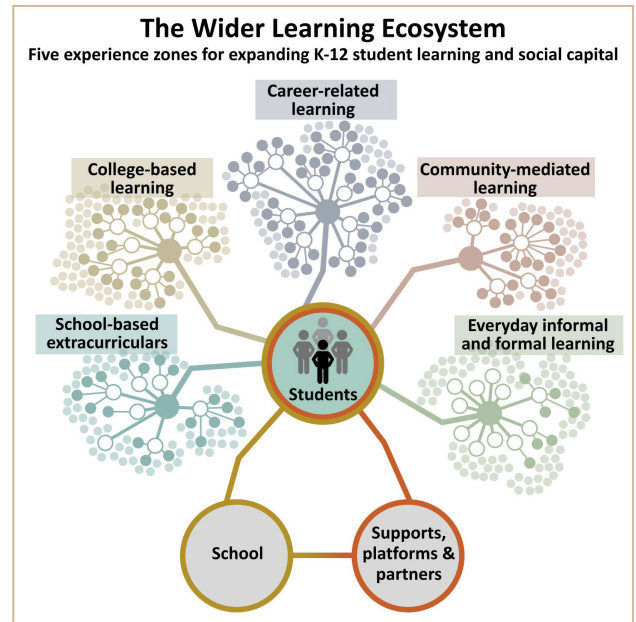
What needs does this tool address and how can I use it?

The Social Capital Tool is designed for users interested in the role of social relationships in the success of real-world learning and Wider Learning Ecosystem offerings and the potential of these experiences to build the three aspects of social capital: social support, developmental relationships, and social connections. The tool offers a way to drill deeper into the key elements of real-world learning, which encompass youth development, adult relationships, and equitable access, among other characteristics.

As described in *5 Essentials in Building Social Capital*, the fourth report in the *MyWays Student Success Series*, social capital should be understood as a human developmental system that plays two important roles in the life of young people: “as support in times of need and as social leverage to get ahead.” Both roles are manifested when real-world learning (as well as classroom learning) are successful; however, significant disparities in social capital between students of varying socioeconomic backgrounds perpetuate the profound opportunity gap that exists in the U.S. today.

Accordingly, a thorough examination of the social capital aspects of a real-world learning experience can help improve both the quality of learning and the potential for lasting social capital benefits that outlive the learning experience. The Social Capital Tool can support you with these activities:

- Assess the types of social capital contained within individual real-world learning experiences
- Assess social capital across the range of real-world learning opportunities offered by your school
- Evaluate how well social capital inputs build social support, developmental relationships, and social connections for students
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to improve real-world learning through social capital
- Develop design criteria for social capital to guide the improvement or design of real-world learning going forward

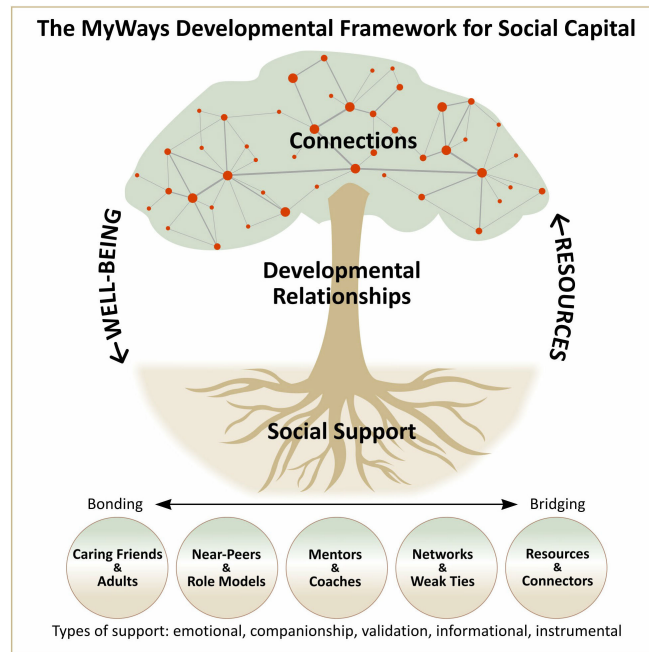


What's Included

- This introduction
- A graphic to introduce the concept and elements to be used in the tool
- A personal experience opening activity
- A sample tool completed for two exemplar RWL experiences
- A blank tool worksheet with two parts
- Facilitator instructions

The MyWays Developmental Framework for Social Capital

Social capital impacts educational attainment and economic mobility at least as much as any other factor. This is Robert Putnam's thesis in *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. Real-world learning experiences, properly designed, provide students with opportunities to access and develop social capital, which is often missing or limited in traditional in-classroom settings. These opportunities are especially vital for economically disadvantaged students and students of color who, based on family background or community, have fewer connections outside of the family or community.



To make social capital research actionable for next generation educators, school designers, and anti-poverty practitioners, the MyWays team created the Developmental Framework for Social Capital, which synthesizes critical connections between social capital, poverty, education, and human development. The framework is comprised of these elements:

- Every individual requires **5 essential types of social capital**. These are identified in the circles across the bottom of the graphic.
- **"Well-being"** and **"Resources"** are two sides of the same social capital coin. Resources accessible through social relations foster well-being and vice versa.
- Social capital is rooted in the **social supports** that students receive. A robust, multi-layered social ecosystem increases the probability of a positive developmental trajectory.
- The trunk of the social capital tree is made of **adult developmental relationships**. The key elements in such relationships are expressing care, challenging growth, providing support, sharing power, and expanding possibilities.
- The branches of the social capital tree are the **social connections** to resources. However, social support and adult developmental relationships serve as the foundation of trust and reciprocity upon which these resources become accessible.

The following resources are designed to support users of the toolkit to connect these social capital principles, as well as their own experience, to the design of real-world learning experiences. For further information about social capital and the MyWays Student Success Framework, see [5 Essentials in Building Social Capital](#), the fourth report in the *MyWays Student Success Series*.

MyWays RWL Social Capital Personal Experience Opener

1. Describe one of the most memorable learning experiences you had during your high school or middle school years (inside or outside of school).

2. To what extent were these five types of social capital a part of that experience?

	Not a part	A minor/moderate part	A significant part
Caring friends and adults			
Near-peers and role models (peers or adults)			
Mentors and coaches (regardless of titles)			
Access to social networks and "weak tie" (acquaintance) relationships			
Access to people connecting you to resources*			

* Almost anything can be a resource including, but not limited to, information, advice, opportunities, material things, digital tools, services, financial resources, other people, and a wide range of social and emotional supports.

3. What impact, good or bad, did these interactions have on your social support network, developmental relationships, or social connections during or after the experience?

4. Based on your personal experience(s) above, good or bad, what lessons do you believe are important in designing and assessing the social capital components of real-world learning?

MyWays RWL Social Capital — Analysis of Sample Experiences

To illustrate, here is a description of the role of social capital in a typical work-based internship and a high school theater production.

5 Types of Social Capital	Work-based internship	High school theater production
Caring Adults & Friends	Particularly important in first-time internships, caring adults and friends provide emotional support, validation, and companionship to the novice entering an unfamiliar environment and challenge.	Theater is often a close, sometimes tense, team experience that tests trust, responsibility, and accountability, but also builds these same muscles. Emotional support, validation, and companionship are especially important when the pressure is on.
Near-Peers & Role Models	Near-peers provide the helpful function of “someone like me who has successfully met the challenges I’m currently facing.” A robust, diverse work organization offers a wide array of adults with functions, specialties, and behaviors students can emulate.	An important benefit of theater is the opportunity to learn from “more knowledgeable others,” including older students, students performing differing roles, and participating adults. In most theater programs, responsibility expands as skills and competence are acquired – often through observing others.
Mentors & Coaches	Timely and effective mentoring and coaching provide both task guidance and crucial developmental relationships. They should receive as much design thought and structure as the intern work tasks themselves. Mentors and coaches can be both formal and informal. Because the apprentice-master learning model can be new for many students, it is an important skill that is learnable through a quality internship.	In theater informal mentoring and coaching often plays a much larger and more meaningful role than formal one-on-one mentoring or coaching. Teaching and learning in the day-to-day problem solving of a theater production is a characteristic of ensemble performance. That said, the value of receiving advice and feedback from more knowledgeable team members (including adults) cannot be overstated.
Networks & Weak Ties	Access to work-based social networks and “weak tie” acquaintances varies with the nature of an internship. Social networks might be accessed for task-specific purposes or to broaden students’ exposure to organization or industry practices.	Most high school theater programs are “school-bounded.” Connections to theater-oriented social networks and weak tie acquaintances may be limited, although external coaches, judges, and community partners can be tapped. Summer stock or community theater are potentially more productive in this regard.
Resources & Connectors	Given that most internships are short-term, a useful question is whether the internship fosters relationships with workplace individuals who can connect students to resources after the expiration of the internship, including people to contact for advice, introductions, or material resources.	The degree of connections to resources beyond the school walls depends on the networks of adult sponsors, but may include local suppliers, photographers, costume shops, and tech advisors.

Section A. Select one or more real-world learning experiences at your school and describe and assess the role that the five types of social capital currently play in those experiences. Where and how is development of social capital strong? What gaps or areas for growth exist?

5 Types of Social Capital	Learning experience 1	Learning experience 2
Caring Adults & Friends		
Near-Peers & Role Models		
Mentors & Coaches		
Networks & Weak Ties		
Resources & Connectors		

Section B. For a deeper assessment of social capital in your existing (or future) real-world learning programs, answer these questions using the table below, which provides rules of thumb with respect to the typical role or impact each type of social capital can play in providing the three primary objectives of social capital: social support, adult developmental relationships, and social connections. For further explanation of these three objectives, see the explanations in [5 Essentials in Building Social Capital](#).

For a single real-world learning experience or a combination of experiences (existing or future), what level of **social support** is provided? Who are the individuals initiating and sustaining this support? What strengths and weaknesses exist?

What level of **adult developmental relationships** are provided? How are these relationships formed and sustained? Are all student segments served equally? What strengths and weaknesses exist?

What level of social connections to individuals with knowledge, contacts, and resources do these experiences provide? What level of **social connection** is attainable given the nature of the specific experience? What strengths and weaknesses exist?

5 Types of SC	Social Support	Adult Developmental Relationships	Social Connections
Caring Adults and Friends	✓+	✓+	✓
Near-Peers & Role Models	✓	✓+	✓
Mentors & Coaches	✓+	✓+	✓
Networks & Weak Ties			✓+
Resources & Connectors			✓+

Facilitator Instructions

General Comments

- A primary goal of this tool is to assist you to think of social capital in developmental terms. The tool should be considered as an exploration of the MyWays Developmental Framework for Social Capital. To build their social capital, students need to be situated in environments, including real-world learning contexts, that allow them to gain relationships and connections experientially but also intentionally.
- Before using the tool, the facilitator should probe what “social capital” means to participants and then guide the group to an understanding of how it is used within MyWays.
- It might be helpful to remind participants that the MyWays Developmental Framework for Social Capital is comprised of five elements. Each of these elements is briefly defined/described on pages 10-15 of Report 4, [5 Essentials in Building Social Capital](#).
- Facilitators should review pages 15-20 of Report 4 for three ways students can master social capital and three ways adults can build social capital systems for young people.
- Finally, social capital, poverty, and trauma are deeply linked. Use the additional insights and resources in Report 5, [Preparing Apprentice-Adults for Life after High School](#) for professional learning experiences that focus on those connections.

Option 1: Use the tool to introduce the social capital aspects of authentic real-world learning experiences

- Assemble the team of educators, community partners, and learners who will be involved in assessing your RWL current state and assets and/or designing a new real-world learning initiative. Assign pre-reading of Report 4 if appropriate for your workshop goals and participants.
- Introduce the “Personal Social Capital Experience Opener” reflection sheet contained in this tool. The characteristics that come out of this exercise are likely to provide a segue into the RWL Social Capital Tool.
- Introduce the important concepts necessary for this analysis using the MyWays Developmental Framework for Social Capital graphic contained in this tool.
- Work through the social capital summary completed for a high school internship and student theater production. These examples will showcase the five types of social capital, introduce the tool, and provide two examples of the different ways in which RWL can happen.

Option 2: Use the tool to assess existing real-world learning experiences

- Assemble your team of educators, community partners, and learners to assess an existing RWL experience that you would like to improve. In this case you will be using the Social Capital Tool to evaluate the quality of the experience.
- Have participants select one or more real-world experiences currently at their schools and work through Section A of the tool individually or in teams to describe and assess the role that the five types of social capital currently play in those experiences.
- Discuss individual responses and common patterns and insights.
- Discuss the three objectives of social capital (social support, adult developmental relationships, social connections). Work through Section B of the tool to do a deeper assessment of participants' real-world learning programs and their potential to achieve these objectives.
- Discuss individual responses and common patterns and insights.

Option 3: Use the tool to design a new real-world learning experience

- Assemble the team of educators, community partners, and learners you want to involve in developing a new RWL experience for which you have identified a need. For this option, you may either use work products from two other tools in the MyWays Real-World Learning Toolkit, the Key Elements and WLE 5 Zones tools, as an initial set of design criteria or start from scratch with the Social Capital Tool.
- Working individually or in teams, use Sections A and B of the tool to triangulate on the optimal types of social capital appropriate to your design and objectives. This work should provide participants with a broad initial design concept that can be iterated using other RWL tools.
- Discuss individual responses and common patterns and insights.



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