



MEASURING SOCIAL CAPITAL:

What Gets Measured
Gets Done.



No galvanized definition of social capital exists. Interpretations are as diverse as wildflowers, rooted in different contexts and ideologies. What everyone agrees on however, is that social capital involves meaningful and durable connections between people. But there's one thing at the base of those connections that allows them to make room for true change and growth: **Reciprocity.**

Reciprocal relationships, more than one-sided promises of aid, provide opportunities that unlock doors to the future, especially for youth living in low-income communities.

Social capital has proven pivotal in promoting the pursuit of meaningful education, healthful choices, and social mobility amongst low-income youth and their families. It has positively impacted the economic life chances of both young and seasoned individuals. Social capital, arguably even more than financial capital, is the parachute that protects affluent children when they fall. While bad grades or a brush with the law can be the death knell for many young people, their well-connected, well-off counterparts have a family friend in their corner helping them through.

SO HOW DO WE DEFINE SOCIAL CAPITAL?



At DeJesus Solutions, we believe that social capital goes beyond the connections: it's the value of one's connections to people, organizations, and institutions. Our Social Capital Builders' Institute (SCBI) reinforces the importance of reciprocation when it comes to establishing strong social capital ties.

In essence, this is the most important facet of social capital: **the receiver must always become the giver.** When young people and their connections understand that they both have value to offer one another, the connection transcends charity or a do-good mentality, and becomes a real partnership.

Strong connections form a platform that further broadens the young person's social capital, empowering them to make new, potentially more life-shifting changes. And when programs understand the importance of reciprocity, social capital and the program participants truly thrive.

Anytime a young person connects to a positive and caring adult, no matter where they are, social capital has the potential to bloom. If that's the case, then why all the disconnected youth? It starts at how we're teaching them about connecting and assisting them in doing so.

NETWORKING IS NOT WORKING

By telling young people the way up and out is to pad their pockets with business cards, programs may be helping them learn basic marketing, but they aren't moving the needle when it comes to building genuine social capital. In our book, *MAKiN' iT: The Six Universal Habits for True Survival and Success*, we emphasize **the crucial difference between networking and social capital building**. Networking on its own flirts dangerously with reinforcing trauma: according to research from the University of Toronto, networking can impact a person's sense of self-worth – and not for the best. The idea of door to door and constantly looking at interactions as an opportunity for someone to “take them there,” people feel dirty, as if each interaction is loaded with a potential to receive¹.

When interactions are seen in that light, it doesn't empower – it maintains a status quo of the top staying on top, and the bottom hoping for a leg up. When the bottom realizes their potential as someone with a lot to offer the more affluent, it does the opposite for their confidence and helps them walk through the world believing in their capacity to succeed.

This is only made worse by our culture's obsession with **meritocracy** – the idea that achievements are awarded based on hard work alone. In reality, our culture seems to have an emphasis on achievements from those who are well-connected, regardless of if the achievement is truly the best or most innovative. For young people, many struggling with issues of self-esteem and constantly being fed false theories of meritocracy, each minute spent networking can further erode their sense of self, leading to declining labor force participation and an increased sense of loneliness.

At SCBI, we argue that resources and time spent networking could be much better spent if allocated to building social capital by cultivating CARTI – our five-pillar approach described below.

NETWORKING IS AN ACTIVITY; SOCIAL CAPITAL IS AN OUTCOME

Networking means making connections (even if that connection is virtual). Social capital is the value of the connection, for both parties involved. That's the outcome.

But to better understand the outcomes of social capital, goals must be defined, and the methods used to attain them measured for efficacy. What gets measured gets done. At DeJesus Solutions, we measure social capital using multiple indicators to determine the solvency of individual, organizational, and business levels of social capital. We've based our work on our experience with more than 500 participants in our social capital building activities. Through this engagement, we've uncovered the **five pillars of CARTI**:

- 1 COMPASSION
- 2 ASSISTANCE
- 3 RECIPROCITY
- 4 TRUST
- 5 INFORMATION

These are the five key elements to build a strong reciprocal relationship –Cardi B isn't the only person from the Bronx teaching young people about money moves. With CARTI, it's more about helping youth, workforce professionals, and businesses assess their current levels of social capital – and make a plan to grow it.



SOCIAL CAPITAL IS CAUGHT, NOT TAUGHT

Often, when we hold SCBI trainings, they unfold like this:

An employer is interested in improving staff morale and wants to implement an employee volunteer program. The employer also serves on the local workforce board and wants her company to get involved in preparing youth for success in the local labor market. During SCBI training, we open up by asking company staff whether they're concerned about the plight of community youth.

Easy enough. The "yes" is always resounding. Then, we ask the staff to name three young people in the community. Eyes glaze, heads turn, while the one staff person involved in their community rattles off the names of all her son's friends. The lesson may have just started, but the point's already been made. After that initial shake-up, we break the staff into groups of five or six and give them a self-audit to measure the impact of the company's connections, asking each person to complete it individually and share their answers with the group. The audit is as simple as this:

1. List an organization in your local area that provides youth with quality, free job-training services and the name and contact information of someone who works there.
2. List an organization in your local area that provides youth with quality, free substance-use services and the name and contact information of someone who works there.
3. List an organization in your local area that provides you with quality, free educational services and the name and contact information of someone who works there
4. List an organization in your local area that provides youth with quality, emergency-housing services and the name and contact information of someone who works there.

For these listings, if the majority of staff all give the same answers, that could be a sign of a high degree of **redundancy**. Simply put, redundancy is information given to you by another that could be omitted because you already have it or can easily access it – for more on how to escape traps of redundancy, keep an eye out for **my next book**, *The Young Adult's Guide to Social-Capital Building*, due out in June 2019.

If this identical information isn't indicative of redundancy, it could be a sign of limited local services, a common issue in rural areas, or an indication that one organization enjoys a disproportionate share of well-established board members and bountiful financial capital resources (although we try not to tread on this topic in SCBI, the facts always take us there).

The most surprising part of the self-audit? How few people know anyone who works in these programs. Through knowing nobody, the staff is missing out on a prime chance to support social-capital building. Where do you stand? How much redundancy is going on in your own workplace? Remember, **you have the power to do something about it now**.

CARTI TAKES IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL



If a manager is truly dedicated to helping their employees build social capital with youth service organizations, then they should be employing CARTI to make those connections mean something.

C: **Compassion for the Program's mission**

A foundation of a relationship between programs and employers, institutions and individuals, and individuals with one another, compassion helps you understand what it is that your connection actually needs, and highlights the intersections of how you can both help one another.

Compassion means being an active listener. Ask explicitly about the other person or institution's goals and needs are – and don't assume people's needs without talking to them individually. Too often, people and employers dive into a situation assuming they know what it is that others need, without addressing how unique their circumstances are. When there's no compassionate lens on what is driving the person or group you seek to connect with, the crux of how to make a meaningful connection is missed.

A: **Willingness to offer Assistance**

Of course, compassion for the program, individual, or institution's mission won't make much of an impact without **genuine willingness to assist those who need it**. Many times, assistance is offered insincerely, out of some sense of obligation, and when it isn't followed through on, a connection that could have borne fruit is instead sullied by flakiness.

When offering help, it is critical to refer back to compassion for the message and goals of the people your program is helping, and to avoid projecting narratives of what you or your program may believe another person's goals should be. A genuine willingness to help in the way that people are asking is a powerful way to build social capital that lasts while making an impact.

R: Defining how your program will Reciprocate

When your program looks for help, think of what it is you can offer in return. For example, if you build a connection with someone who works in a housing program, while your program focuses on education resources, encourage the housing coordinator to reach out when clients express interest in education, or put one another in touch with client resources. **Each relationship should be reciprocal**, and the people your program assists should be empowered with the knowledge that they are **capable of offering something worthwhile**, themselves.

T: Building Trust Across the Aisle

Few things build social capital to the same degree as trust, something that comes hand in hand with reciprocity, assistance, and compassion. When programs, institutions, and individuals prove themselves as reliable to one another, **the capacity to share with and support one another unfolds**, strengthening bonds, and paving the way for the final facet of CARTI to be achieved that much more easily.

I: Information Exchange

Exchanging information is a simple, powerful tool that puts those who usually are on the receiving end in the position of a giver. When it comes to programs offering services to underserved groups, listening to what the population they're serving is a valuable source of information on **how to make a good program great**.

In return, the program can adjust its content and approach to suit the needs of their populations served based on the information they receive from them, and therefore give those individuals better, more pertinent information than they may otherwise have gotten.

CARTI is a diagnostic that provides practical tools to effectively gauge the health of your social capital, breathe life into stagnant connections, and forge new ones **that empower both sides of the arrangement**.

Curious about how to build more meaningful social capital and start really making a quantifiable difference? Reach out to us at 202-713-8393 or ed@dejesussolutions.com.

¹: *The Contaminating Effects of Building Instrumental Ties: How Networking Can Make Us Feel Dirty*, Tiziana Casciaro, Francesca Gino, Maryam Kouchaki, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 59, 4: pp. 705-735. , First Published October 6, 2014.



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DeJesus has authored numerous publications on the issue of disconnected youth. He is a highly sought-after keynote and lecturer on the subject.

DeJesus' recent book, MAKIN' iT: The Six Universal Habits for True Survival and Success has been described as a transformative experience for anyone seeking change.

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