

Search Institute's Developmental Assets Framework

Overview

The Developmental Assets articulate the broad ecology of youth development, highlighting the need for all aspects of communities to support positive development while also recognizing the strengths young people have that shape their own development. The Search Institute's Developmental Assets Framework promotes 40 positive supports and strengths that young people need to succeed. The 40 assets are grouped into internal and external assets with four asset areas each.

Internal Assets focus on the social-emotional strengths, values, and commitments that are nurtured within young people:

- **Commitment to Learning:** Young people need a sense of the lasting importance of learning and a belief in their own abilities.
 - Achievement Motivation, School Engagement, Homework, Bonding to School, Reading for Pleasure
- **Positive Values:** Young people need to develop strong guiding values or principles to help them make healthy life choices.
 - Caring, Equality and Social Justice, Integrity, Honesty, Responsibility, Restraint
- **Social Competencies:** Young people need the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions, and to cope with new situations.
 - Planning and Decision Making, Interpersonal Competence, Cultural Competence, Resistance Skills, Peaceful Conflict Resolution

The Developmental Assets Framework

Search Institute

"Asset building has less to do with hiring more professionals and starting new programs than it does in activating and enhancing the capacity of community members to build sustained, informal positive relationships with children and teenagers."

– Peter Benson

The briefs in this 10-part series each describe an individual framework currently in use. They are intended to illustrate how frameworks can be analyzed and help practitioners learn to evaluate frameworks on the types of criteria that matter most in their settings. The briefs are not an endorsement of these frameworks.

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- **Positive Identity:** Young people need to believe in their own self-worth and to feel that they have control over the things that happen to them.
 - Personal Power, Self-Esteem, Sense of Purpose, Positive View of Personal Future

External Assets, while not SEL competencies, focus on the relationships and opportunities that youth need in their families, schools, and communities:

- **Support:** Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate, and accept them.
 - Family Support, Positive Family Communication, Other Adult Relationships, Caring Neighborhood, Caring School Climate, Parent Involvement in Schooling
- **Empowerment:** Young people need to feel valued and valuable; this happens when youth feel safe and respected.
 - Community Values Youth, Youth as Resources, Service to Others, Safety
- **Boundaries and Expectations:** Young people need clear rules, consistent consequences for breaking rules, and encouragement to do their best.
 - Family Boundaries, School Boundaries, Neighborhood Boundaries, Adult Role Models, Positive Peer Influence, High Expectations
- **Constructive Use of Time:** Young people need opportunities (outside of school) to learn and develop new skills and interests with other youth and adults.
 - Creative Activities, Youth Programs, Religious Community, Time at Home

COMPETENCIES NAMED IN THIS FRAMEWORK*

Internal Assets

- ✓ Commitment to learning
- ✓ Positive values
- ✓ Positive identity
- ✓ Empowerment

*Note that the competencies are organized into internal and external assets with four areas within each. There are more specific competencies named per area (see text).

History of the Framework

Originally created in 1990 by Peter Benson, the Developmental Assets Framework is a positive youth development framework grounded in an ecological perspective of development and based on resilience and prevention research. The framework grew out of a community-based tool used in 1989 and was designed to identify internal strengths and external supports and relationships that young people need to make positive choices and avoid risky behaviors. It was updated in 1996 to be developmentally relevant from early childhood through adolescence. The framework has proven to be an effective, widely used approach to positive youth development in the United States and increasingly, around the world. The Developmental Assets® are 40 research-based, positive experiences and qualities that influence young people’s development, helping them become caring, responsible, and productive adults.

Purpose and Intended Audience

The Developmental Assets framework was designed as a tool for bringing communities together to create a shared vision for and commitment to children and youth. Intended for broad vision-building, the framework’s language is accessible to everyday citizens, youth, and adults.

Settings

Developmental Assets are situated in all aspects of family, school, and community life. They are used in communities and youth-serving organizations around the world.

Consider this focus on Internal assets:

INTERNAL ASSETS	COMMITMENT TO LEARNING	21 Achievement Motivation	23 Homework
		22 School Engagement	24 Bonding to School
			25 Pleasure Reading
	POSITIVE VALUES	26 Caring	29 Honesty
	27 Equality and Social Justice	30 Responsibility	
	28 Integrity	31 Restraint	
SOCIAL COMPETENCY	32 Plan/Decision Making	34 Cultural Competence	
	33 Interpersonal Competence	35 Resistance Skills	
		36 Conflict Resolution	
POSITIVE IDENTITY	37 Personal Control	40 Positive View of Personal Future	
	38 Self-Esteem		
	39 Sense of Purpose		

Criteria Ratings: Conceptual Clarity

FIVE CONCEPTUAL CLARITY CRITERIA			
CRITERIA	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Specificity	Definitions of each asset are provided; however, definitions are not always specific. Observable behaviors are not presented.		
Balance	The framework addresses both internal capabilities as well as external factors that youth need to be successful, addressing relationships and communities. The assets include intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies and values but do not include cognitive competencies.		
Developmental	The Search Institute has developed age-specific adaptations of the framework from early childhood through adolescence and worked to show the developmental progression of the assets. Working with developmental scholars, the framework’s assets are adapted for four age groups: 3-5, 5-9, 8-12, 12-18. http://page.search-institute.org/40-developmental-assets		
Culturally Sensitive	This common framework itself is static yet adaptable and can be applied in different contexts. Data has shown the core assets predict positive outcomes effectively across ethnic groups. The framework has been adapted to build assets in culturally relevant ways and used broadly across groups of students and in many countries. Independent translations of the Developmental Assets Framework created by local community groups for use with the children, youth, and families they serve are available in Acholi, Arabic, Armenian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Farsi, French, Hmong, Japanese, Khmer, Nuer, Russian, Somali, Urdu and Vietnamese. Developers acknowledge that all young people do not experience assets in the same ways, and that assets may play different roles in their lives based on their culture, context, and experience; however, explicit guidance around this is not given.		
Empirically Grounded	Data collected from Search Institute surveys of more than six million children and youth from all backgrounds and situations have consistently demonstrated that the more Developmental Assets young people acquire, the better their chances of succeeding in school and becoming happy, healthy, and contributing members of their communities and society. Research shows that youth with the most assets are more likely to succeed in school, help others, overcome adversity, and value diversity, as well as less likely to have problems with alcohol use, violence, illicit drug use, and sexual activity.		

These ratings are intended to help illustrate the strengths and limits of some popular frameworks. They are neither designed to formally compare frameworks nor endorse any framework. The ratings are based on criteria defined more fully in [this brief](#) and the process of rating and appropriate uses are discussed in the [introductory brief](#) to this series. We urge practitioners to review these and prioritize which criteria are most important for use in their particular context.

Criteria Ratings: Implementation Support

FIVE IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT CRITERIA			
CRITERIA	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Intended for Practice	The Developmental Assets Framework intentionally includes all aspects of community, including neighborhood and school contexts as a whole. They are designed to be easily understood and used in practice.		
Resources for Practitioners	Several products and tools for introducing the framework are available on the Search Institute website. These include activity books, group games and activities introducing the assets, books (Pass It On), research publications, handouts for various stakeholders, and tools for the classroom (posters, cards, etc.). Additionally, Search Institute continues to offer surveys, training, and print resources for educators and community members.		
Resources for Use with Children and Youth	Search Institute offers handouts and activity books for children and youth to use.		
Resources for Measurement and Data Use	<p>Search Institute offers three key youth self-report surveys. The Attitudes and Behavior survey measures the 40 developmental assets and core indicators of risk and is used by schools for prevention grants impacting six million young people. The Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) is a 58-item measure of 8 domains that is sensitive to change and used in programs and schools. The DAP has been contextualized, translated, and validated for use in more than 30 languages and countries, particularly in the developing world (Scales, 2011). For information on available adaptations, contact Search Institute. The Youth and Program Strengths (YAPS) survey includes the DAP (above) as well as measures of program quality for out-of-school-time programs.</p> <p>Information on the surveys can be found at https://www.search-institute.org/surveys/</p>		
Empirically Tested	Over the past few decades, the Developmental Assets framework and approach to youth development became a frequently cited and widely utilized youth development framework in the world. Additionally, newer efforts around Developmental Relationships and around measurement are used around the world.		
<p><i>These ratings are intended to help illustrate the strengths and limits of some popular frameworks. They are neither designed to formally compare frameworks nor endorse any framework. The ratings are based on criteria defined more fully in this brief and the process of rating and appropriate uses are discussed in the introductory brief to this series. We urge practitioners to review these and prioritize which criteria are most important for use in their particular context.</i></p>			

Summary of the Framework

In 1990, Search Institute released a framework of Developmental Assets, which identifies a set of skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that enable young people to develop into successful and contributing adults. Numerous resources, measurements, and practitioner tools are widely offered and now utilized around the world.

About the Developer

For more than 50 years, Search Institute® has been a leader and

Search > partner for organizations
I N S T I T U T E around the world in
discovering what children
and youth need to succeed.

Their research, resources,

and expertise help organizations, schools, and community coalitions solve critical challenges in the lives of young people. Search Institute focuses on deepening understanding and working with partners to improve the lives of young people, generating knowledge and insight through mixed-methods research, developing and disseminating resources to stimulate change based on the research, and working with partners to improve outcomes in the lives of young people, particularly those who have historically been marginalized in society.

About the Author



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Teresa Borowski is a graduate student in the Community and Prevention Research PhD program in Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), where her research focuses on social-emotional competence development, particularly through dance and other arts. She works as a research specialist with CASEL's research team and the Frameworks subgroup of the Assessment Work Group. She is also the co-editor of Measuring SEL's blog. Prior to UIC, Teresa worked as a research assistant in the Infant Cognition Lab and the Cultural Studio at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and for the Learning and Memory Lab at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology.

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Useful Links to Explore

- Search Institute website: <http://www.search-institute.org/>
- Developmental Assets Framework: <http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18>

The Measuring SEL Series of Frameworks Briefs

The Establishing Practical Social-Emotional Competence Assessments of Preschool to High School Students project as guided by the Assessment Work Group (AWG) is dedicated to helping advance the effective use of data to inspire practice in SEL. In deciding how the AWG could best contribute to advancing the field and complement rather than compete with other efforts underway to address the challenges of multiple frameworks and inconsistent use of language, the AWG Frameworks Subgroup, led by Stephanie Jones and Roger Weissberg, developed four series of briefs designed for practitioners. Each series and each brief in the series is designed to help advance how people think about the issues and make reasonable choices that work best for them and their context. We hope they provide a set of “building blocks” that systems and practitioners can use to advance and improve their SEL efforts. Learn more at <https://measuringSEL.casel.org>

Introductory Series

These briefs are about what frameworks are, how they are useful, the challenges and opportunities they present in practice, and defining criteria that are helpful when considering what frameworks to use.

Comparative Series

These briefs explore efforts underway to categorize and align ways of thinking about comparing unique frameworks. The briefs also describe tools available to aid systems and practitioners in their selection and use of a framework.

Special Issues Series

These briefs identify critical issues that frameworks must address or that influence how they are used that are important to consider when selecting and using frameworks, such as equity and SEL, and developmental considerations.

Descriptive Series

These briefs each describe an individual framework currently in use. They are intended to illustrate how frameworks can be analyzed and help practitioners learn to evaluate frameworks on the types of criteria that matter most in their settings. *(The briefs are not an endorsement of these frameworks.)*

The Assessment Work Group is committed to advancing dialogue on key issues in the field and stating a perspective when appropriate. The views and opinions expressed in these briefs reflect the general position of the Assessment Work Group. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of CASEL or any of the individual organizations involved with the work group.